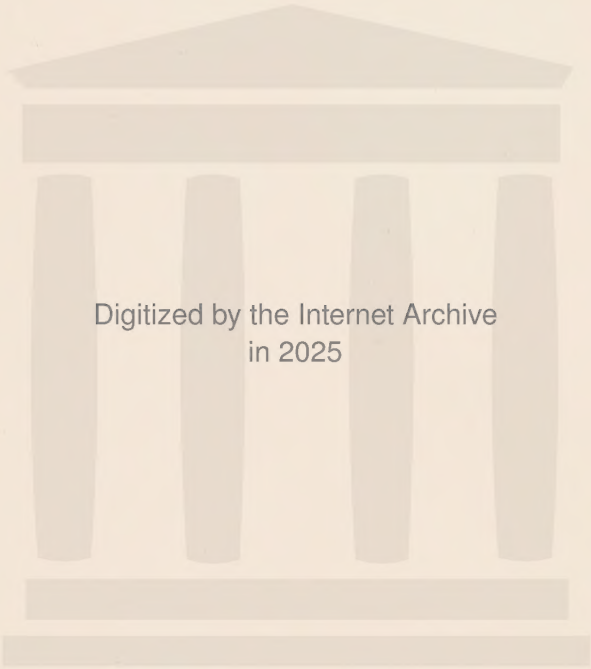
Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/allalongrivernov00brad_2

ALL ALONG THE RIVER

A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"ISHMAEL," "VIXEN," "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET,"
ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES
VOL. III.

LONDON
SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, HAMILTON, KENT & CO. LIMITED
STATIONERS' HALL COURT
1893

[*All rights reserved*]

LONDON:
PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
STAMFORD STREET AND CHARING CROSS.

CONTENTS OF VOL. III.

	PAGE
One Fatal Moment	1
It is easier for a Camel	62
The Ghost's Name	100
Stapylton's Plot	166
His Oldest Friends	190
"If there be any of you"	241
The Island of Old Faces	256
My Dream	280

ALL ALONG THE RIVER.

ONE FATAL MOMENT.

PART I.

It was one of the rainiest days of the rainiest winter in the decade of 1860 to 1870, when the colonel, and three other officers of a crack cavalry regiment, the Queen's Black Rangers, were mewed up in a mouldy old inn in the cathedral city of Lowford, in the eastern counties.

Lowford cathedral is one of the finest churches in Europe ; and the city of Lowford is one of the most depressing holes that ever Englishmen and Englishwomen were doomed to inhabit. Some of the dullest and ugliest towns in England are in a manner redeemed by the smartness

and excellence of their principal hotel. The passing stranger sees from his inn window that the town is an execrable place, that the High Street is the abomination of desolation, and the market-place the abode of commercial despair; but he sees these things with an indifferent eye, lapped in the luxury of a well-ordered hotel, and cheered by the contents of a carefully chosen cellar.

But at Lowford all is alike dreary and despicable. The cathedral stands afar off upon a bold elevation, the only hill within a radius of forty miles, and looks down upon the squalid and unbeautiful city, and on the dismal flat fields and waste spaces that surround it, looks down from the far-off centuries when this flat England was broken up into battle-fields, with a grand and stony contempt. The best inn is a large rambling house at the shabbiest end of the town, with large low rooms, ponderous furniture of the horsehair and mahogany period, long dark passages, and an all-pervading gloom, which chills the blood and depresses the spirits of even the most cheery and volatile traveller. The bagman, that epitome of joviality, has

never been known to put up at the King's Arms, Lowford. The commercial element is to be found at an inferior but less sepulchral house, the George, in the heart of the High Street.

The King's Arms is at the bottom of the cathedral hill, and on the outskirts of the town. At sunset the gigantic shadow of the cathedral falls across the hotel windows and wraps the front of the house in premature darkness. Yet the landlord and his minions assume a pride in this dismal situation, and take credit to themselves for being near the cathedral.

Pleasure had brought the Queen's Rangers to Lowford; and idleness had kept them there for the space of two wet empty days. Two nights ago Lowford had awakened from its chronic sluggishness to the feverish dissipation of a county ball; and the Queen's Rangers had come over from their head-quarters at the garrison town, twenty miles north of Lowford, to enliven the Corn Exchange with the excellence of their waltzing and the brilliancy of their conversation.

They had come, seen and conquered, the

admired and chosen of the assembly; they had been the glory and the delight of ball-room and supper-room; they had been lunched and dined by the best people in the neighbourhood on the day after the ball; and they had refused ever so many invitations to luncheon and dinner for this dreary day which saw them lounging in despondent idleness in a spacious and ghastly apartment on the first floor of the King's Arms, an apartment which does duty for a public dining-room or a private drawing-room according to the exigencies of the case.

They had refused the most tempting invitations on the plea that they were due at Wilmington Barracks on this particular afternoon; and then reaction had set in after two days and nights of gaiety and high living, and they were taking their ease in a dreary lassitude, telling each other that they were weather-bound, albeit cabs were within call to convey them to the station, and the railroad was provided to carry them back to Wilmington.

The morning had been given up to absolute laziness. They had merged breakfast and luncheon into a composite meal at one o'clock,

a meal in which cayenne and brandy and soda formed an important element; and now they were sprawling about upon the uncomfortable horse-hair sofas and the impracticable arm-chairs in number eighteen, the King's Arms; and already the more impetuous spirits were weary of the lotus-eaters' repose and were crying out for something to do.

"You might just as well have let us accept the dinner at the Deanery, colonel!" said Major Mostyn.

"It certainly seemed a mistake to refuse such an invitation," urged St. Servian, a subaltern, a lad of good birth, who was a great favourite with the colonel, and indeed with all the regiment; "one ought not to turn up one's nose at a man who has three pretty daughters and a good cook. I am told the cook's reputation in Lowford is even superior to the renown of the daughters."

"People in such a hole as Lowford are likely to care about their dinners," said the colonel, with supreme contempt.

He was one of the best soldiers in the service and had covered himself with glory a few years

ago at the siege of Lucknow. The Black Rangers were no feather-bed soldiers. They had suffered and fought all through the terrible campaign of reprisals. They had fought side by side with Napier, and Hodson and Daly, and their colonel was a man who cared neither for wine nor women, and for whom the pleasures of the table were *nil*. He cared, however, for his brother officers, and was known as the grimmest of men and the most delightful of companions. There was a raciness in his conversation, a distinctly masculine flavour which his juniors thoroughly appreciated. He had never laid himself out to please a woman within their memory, yet he took the keenest interest in their conquests and love affairs. He could dine upon an Abernethy biscuit and a bottle of soda-water, yet he presided with *éclat* at a mess which was famous for its excellence, and he never grudged the cost of the wines which he rarely tasted.

The Rangers were of opinion that the colonel had had some great sorrow in his youth; or, in their own phraseology, that he had been run off his legs while he was a two-year-old.

St. Servian had joined the regiment since the return from India. He was never tired of hearing mess-room stories of the Mutiny, and the colonel's prowess, the colonel himself being dumb as one of the Pharaohs upon the subject, and no man daring to praise him in his presence. Perhaps it was this naïve admiration, a kind of boyish hero-worship, which had touched Andrew Forrester's tough old heart, and attached him to the lad. Anyhow the colonel's regard for Cyril St. Servian was an open secret in the mess-room, and St. Servian was allowed a freedom of speech rarely permitted to a subaltern.

"A fig for the Dean's dinner," said jovial Major Mostyn, always keen for pleasures of the wilder order, a man who would have been in his element with Tom and Jerry in their raids upon the watchmen of antique London, and whom his juniors had christened the Corinthian. "Who cares for the stereotyped provincial dinner? We should be treated to the same *menu* and the same hired waiters we had last night at Sir Henry's, most likely; prosy conversation over the cigarettes in the dining-room; lugubrious music and strong tea in the drawing-room. We

want something less conventional than the Deanery dinner or the Deanery daughters. We want to make a night of it. We want to live. What do you say to some tremendous sell, something which should wake up this stupid old city? A false report of a fire at a farm ten miles off, a midnight ride on the engine, we all volunteering to help, and a supper to the firemen afterwards? I would much rather hobnob with the firemen over devilled bones and whisky punch than eat the Dean's February salmon and barn-fed lamb."

"If there is one offence against good manners more loathsome than another it is the practical joke," said the colonel, sternly. "If you can't suggest anything better than a lying message and a bogus fire, Mostyn, you can shut up."

"What kind of novel entertainment can a man devise in such a hole as this?" grumbled the major; "a sink of dreariness where there is not so much as a barrel-organ to enliven the silence —nothing but the drip from that infernal gutter."

He was standing at the window watching the water dripping from the eaves, and splashing

with a monotonous regularity upon the pavement below. There was not a mortal to be seen in the street, now that the feeble old woman, whose struggles with a dilapidated umbrella he had been watching with a fiendish pleasure, had disappeared round a corner. There was no one; nothing; not a sound.

Yes, there was the distant blast of a trumpet, followed by the roll of a drum; and then there came the blare of a triumphal march, "See the conquering hero," and then a shrill cheer, from the throats of small boys.

"What can it all mean?" asked the colonel, looking lazily upward from beneath meditative brows.

"A circus!" exclaimed Mostyn. "It can be nothing but a circus. *Grande entrée* of Signor Somebody's celebrated equestrian troupe, which has performed before all the crowned heads of Europe and the Shah of Persia. We all know the kind of thing. This is glorious; the poor bedraggled wretches are riding into the town. Such a nice day for the *grande entrée*. Here they come, by Jove! A team of sixteen, four abreast, the usual mealy chesnuts and creams and

piebalds, and a fellow in pasteboard armour driving them, almost as ridiculous as the Lord Mayor's Show."

He had flung up the window, and was leaning out of it, looking with laborious laziness down the street. The other men picked themselves up and sauntered slowly to the window, curious only from sheer idleness.

The circus troupe was third-rate as to number and horseflesh, in spite of the triumphal chariot which led the way, with its awkward team straggling over the road. After the chariot came half a dozen fair equestrians in fancy-dress; and it was on these that the Rangers concentrated their attention. They rode along two and two, and they all had the same weary air, dishevelled by the wind and rain, and with a blue pinched look that was not to be disguised by the thickest coating of chalk and rouge. The two first looked worn and ill-fed and middle-aged, in their splendour of green velvet and gold Louis Quinze hunting-dresses, and three-cornered hats *à la Diana Vernon.* The third and fourth were dressed as Amazons, with a great display of naked arms; and these had

evidently been chosen for youth and good looks. The fifth and sixth were even better looking, one dressed *à la Turque*, the other, a thin Will-o'-the-wisp of a girl who hardly looked sixteen, as the veritable Diana, with a sky-blue velvet tunic, spangled buskins, and a silver-foil crescent in her hair.

"Quite a bevy of beauty, upon my life," said St. Servian. "We must patronize their show, colonel; we must give them a bespeak."

"They have kept the best for the last," said Captain Sedgebrook; looking across the subaltern's shoulder, and now for the first time awakening to the faintest interest in the conversation.

A seventh *écuyère* rode slowly by, alone, a tall, splendidly built young woman, on a big white horse.

She was dressed as Joan of Arc, in spangled armour, and a spangled helmet of the Crusader pattern, and below the spangled frontlet the Rangers saw as handsome a face as they had ever looked upon—bold, clearly cut features and splendid black eyes, a look of pride that would have become a duchess in a Radical assembly;

defiant pride, aggressive pride almost. She had not coated her face with white paint like the other women, nor had she darkened her eyebrows as they had. She was very pale, and the colonel thought that her face had the look of an evening sky in the sultry summer time, just before a storm.

He looked at her intently, eagerly, with a keener interest than his brother officers had ever seen him show in a woman's face. She looked up, hearing voices at the window, looked up and contemplated all those strange faces with a curiously deliberate expression, as she rode slowly by.

"Colonel," cried Mostyn, scrutinizing his commanding officer, "I verily believe you're smitten."

"No," said the colonel. "That woman reminds me of some one I knew when I was young. She takes me back ten years."

"Oh, colonel, you don't mean that you were young ten years ago?" cried the subaltern, with his silvery, womanish little laugh.

"I was thirty, Cyril, and I thought myself a young man."

To St. Servian at twenty this sounded like a joke, yet no doubt it was so—he told himself—a man of forty, a man like the colonel, who was decidedly old for his age, would look back and fancy himself a youngster at thirty.

"Let's send an orderly round to engage seats for the show," said the subaltern.

"No, that won't do," said the colonel. "First and foremost, a circus is dull work, unless it's a good one—and we can see that this must be a third-rate show—and, in the second place, we can't afford to exhibit ourselves in a booth after having refused half a dozen invitations upon the plea that we were due in barracks."

"I've a bright suggestion. Let's ask the circus people to supper after the show. Of course, only the women," said Mostyn.

"My dear Mostyn, this is almost as bad a suggestion as your first; and if such a disreputable supper-party were to get wind——"

"But it needn't," interrupted the Corinthian. "We can keep it dark as Erebus. We'll tell the landlord and waiters to keep our counsel; and as for the fair equestrians, why, they'll have left the town to-morrow, and be delighting some

other locality. Besides, I call it uncommonly uncharitable on your part, Forrester, to stigmatize these dear ladies *en masse* with such an ugly epithet as disreputable."

"I didn't apply the adjective to the ladies, but to the proposed entertainment. But even if I were willing to humour your folly and invite this circus-crew, do you think they'd come?" asked the colonel.

"Think! why I'm sure of it. Champagne and spatchcocks, after the heat of the gas and the smell of the sawdust—a jovial supper with half a dozen officers and gentlemen in the best hotel in the town! Is it likely they'll refuse? Pitch us over the inkstand, Servy"—short for St. Servian—"and I'll write the invitation."

He seated himself, and with a flourish of his pen began the following note:

"The Colonel and Officers of the Queen's Black Rangers have the honour to invite the ladies of the equestrian troupe to a champagne supper at twelve o'clock this evening."

"Will that do?" he asked, after he had read his note aloud.

"I hope Joan of Arc will come," said the colonel, meditatively.

"The colonel begs to express his earnest desire to be honoured with the presence of the lady who so beautifully impersonates the Maid of Orleans," wrote the major, before any one could object.

An orderly was summoned, and entrusted with the delivery of the invitation to the right person.

"See that you put it into the hands of one of the ladies of the troupe, and bring us back her answer, written or verbal," commanded Mostyn.

The orderly returned in less than an hour with the answer.

"I saw that tall, strapping young woman in the spangled armour," he told the colonel, upon being requested to give a graphic account of his reception by the Bohemians. "They're billeted at a low public-house on the outskirts of the town, and she came to the door when I asked for one of the ladies, and took the letter out of my hand. She tore it open and just looked at it, and then looked at me as if she'd half a mind to knock me down. 'You can say that we are

coming,' she answered short off, and turned on her heel."

"Was she in armour still?"

"Yes, colonel. She'd only just got off her horse, I believe. She looked tired, and her hair was all loose about her face; but she looked like a duchess for all that."

The Rangers ordered a sumptuous supper, the best the hotel or the town could furnish, and the best brand of champagne in the wine list. The party was a joke; but it was due to their own honour that the joke should be carried out in the best possible manner. They dressed as carefully as if they had been going to dine with the Dean's handsome daughters, and then after dinner they sat down to a quiet rubber and played till the cathedral clock chimed the third quarter before midnight, and the supper-table in the adjoining room was ready for the banqueters.

The four men went to look at the table. Yes, everything was very nice. The champagne in old-fashioned plated wine coolers, the gilded necks of the bottles just showing above the silver rims of the vessels. There were hot-house grapes

and hot-house flowers in profusion, and cracker bon-bons, gorgeous in gold and silver foil.

"By Jove! it looks like a wedding-breakfast," said St. Servian, smiling across the board, rosy-cheeked, violet-eyed, golden-haired, looking like a cherub in evening clothes.

He was radiant. Perhaps, as the night wore on, the elder men may have begun to repent their jest, and to fancy the advent of the *écuyères* with the small hours might savour of boredom; but Cyril was all on the alert. To Cyril, the circus riders meant a revelation.

"I never saw one of them outside the ring," he said. "It must be capital fun to hear them talk."

"Lord bless you," said the colonel, "they'll talk just like everybody else. I shouldn't wonder if they play the second-rate lady so well that we shall fancy ourselves in Brompton or Bayswater."

The drawing-room door was flung open, and a waiter ushered in the guests, who came *en masse*, like visitors on the stage.

They had a very heterogeneous air. Some were in evening dress, and some not. One elderly person with straw-coloured hair, wore blue satin,

with a black lace scarf, which was evidently meant to modify the display of opulent bust and shoulders, but which was ineffectual. A middle-aged houri was in tartan silk, with a square-cut bodice, and a parure of bog-oak and Irish diamonds. The rest were less gorgeously attired; and Joan of Arc, who came last, wore a rusty black cashmere gown, in which no parlour-maid who respected herself would have appeared. Her hair was brushed back from her temples and rolled in a great careless knot at the top of her aristocratic-looking head. The only relief to the sombre, black gown was a rag of white lace tied round her throat, and—in this attire, with a certain defiant air and carriage, as if she felt her shabbiness and gloried in it—she looked so grand and beautiful a creature that the four men almost held their breath as they gazed at her.

Scarcely conscious of what he was doing, the colonel gave her his arm to lead her to the supper-room, albeit she looked the youngest of the seven.

The other three men followed, with a lady upon each arm. There was a little pleasant con-

fusion and a good deal of giggling as the fair guests settled into their places, and by the time the oysters and chablis had gone round the ice was completely broken, and conversation was in full swing.

The *écuyères* had plenty to talk about, and they were not a bit like the ladies of Bayswater or Brompton. That fact was an infinite relief to their entertainers. Their conversation was remarkable for its ease and *aplomb*, and it was essentially horsey. They knew a good deal about racing, and had here a common ground with their hosts. They had strong opinions about the running of the favourite for the Great Ebor, in the last York Summer, and declared that there had been foul play. Talk ran fast and furious among the six ladies and the four gentlemen: but Joan of Arc sat silent, ate little, drank less, and looked on at the feast with a cold, inscrutable beauty, which held the colonel's attention, until he too lapsed into silence, and occupied himself chiefly in observing that splendid face.

The champagne had gone round a good many times; the ladies were growing boisterous, and

three had accepted cigarettes: frank chaff had succeeded to polite conversation; the Corinthian had yielded to the pretty playfulness of the lady on his left hand, and had allowed a lobster claw to be fixed upon his fine, aquiline nose. Cyril St. Servian had flirted with a fat, flaxen beauty in blue cotton velvet, until weariness had come upon him suddenly, as if he had found it at the bottom of his glass. The room had grown too hot for endurance, and a French window which opened into the inn garden had been flung wide to the cool, grey night.

The rain was over, and out of doors there was a great stillness, broken now and again by the sonorous cathedral bell chiming the quarters.

By-and-by—no one knew how it came about—the conversation drifted from the turf and the theatres to politics, and they began to talk about Fenianism and the Manchester Martyrs, whose execution had taken place somewhat recently. Argument ran high. Most of the ladies were of opinion that the Manchester Martyrs deserved their fate, and that the Fenians were a vile and bloodthirsty crew; and from the mode in which they carried on the discussion it was tolerably

obvious that none of the speakers had a very clear idea what a Fenian was or what a Fenian wanted to bring about.

The colonel, who had been drinking much less and talking much less than his juniors, saw a sudden lighting up of the violet eyes which he had been watching so intently during the last half hour, a sudden quivering of the full red lips, a sudden darkening of the low, classic brow.

The lips parted and the full contralto voice was heard above the babble—

"What do any of you fools know about Ireland?" asked Joan of Arc with infinite scorn.

"That's polite, at any rate," cried a shrill soprano, the voice of the skittish fair who had disguised the Corinthian's nose. "We know quite as much as we want to about Ireland. We know that you came out of it, and that's quite enough to prevent us wishing ever to go there."

There was a laugh at this, and St. Servian, upon whom the wine had been more potent than upon his seniors, was almost hysterical.

"She came out of Ireland like the snakes," he said, in an explosion of laughter. "St. Anthony would have none of her."

There was a chorus of feminine laughter at this, the company being ready to laugh at anything; and then Cyril St. Servian, wild with youth and wine, launched into a tirade against Ireland and the Irish. He reviled them as only a man who has Irish blood in his veins ever reviles Irishmen. He was Irish on the maternal side, and in some moods was boastful of his descent from Hibernian kings. To-night his tongue ran riot in a torrent of contemptuous abuse. These Fenians were murderers and villains, traitors who would sell the cause for which they did their evil deeds, were the price of betrayal good enough to tempt their cupidity—scoundrels without honour or honesty——"

He was rushing on with his invective when Joan of Arc stood up, high above them all in her straight, black gown, and with her heavy knot of ebon hair crowning her head like a helmet. She snatched up the glass of wine that stood untouched by her plate, and flung its contents in his face.

"You paltry little liar!" she cried, "how dare you sit there and lie about Irishmen?"

"Gently, Joan, gently," said the colonel, lay-

ing a broad, firm hand upon her arm, "the boy has had wine enough already, without yours. He is only a boy, and you mustn't be angry at his balderdash."

Those words "boy," "balderdash," stung St. Servian worse than the open insult from a woman. It had been bad enough to be called a little liar —little, mark you—by this circus-riding termagant, but for his dear colonel to make light of him was not to be borne.

"I say again, and I'll say again and again," he spluttered, wiping the wine from his fair, boyish face, "there's not a man in Ireland who wouldn't sell himself to-morrow to the highest bidder. I say again that Irishmen are all liars, and Irishwomen are all——"

The foul word was only half uttered when it died on his lips. No one at the table had seen her snatch the knife that lay by the colonel's plate. They only saw the glitter of the blade as she lifted it suddenly in her strong right hand and brought it swiftly down upon St. Servian's chest, just between the delicate cambric tie and the heart-shaped opening of the waistcoat. No one knew what she meant till the lad gave a

strange, bubbling cry, and a great gush of blood covered his shirt front with crimson. He had bent over the table in his defiance of her, with his finger-tips resting on the cloth, and his face approaching hers, they two standing up while all the rest were seated, the women puffing their cigarettes or sipping their wine, the men amused at the row, no one apprehending any evil beyond hot words and broken glasses.

In one instant the farce was changed to tragedy. The colonel sprang to his feet first of all, and caught the wounded boy in his arms, full of fear. The rest rose hurriedly; and all was wild confusion, in the midst of which one tall form rushed to the open window and vanished into the night.

"Stop her! Stop that murderess!" cried Forrester, as she dashed past him, never taking his eyes from the dying boy's face.

He knew that the knife had pierced his heart —that all the surgical skill in Europe would be vain to save that young life. St. Servian was dying. Life ebbed fast as the fair, bright head lay on the colonel's breast, the knife still sticking in the wound. A sigh, and then another, longer,

fainter than the first, and all was over. As that last sigh was breathed the cathedral clock struck three, with the sound of a passing bell.

Mostyn and Sedgebrook were searching the inn garden, followed by a couple of agitated waiters who had been sitting up to attend to any orders for more wine, and to see the visitors out. The garden was small, with a square grass plat, and a flower border, where the faded chrysanthemums hung low and dilapidated upon their sticks. There was hardly covert for a cat in such a garden, and the men were soon assured that the murderess must have got beyond that narrow enclosure. A park-paling divided the garden from a lane leading down to the river. No doubt she had climbed the fence, since the gate was locked, and the key safe in the inn kitchen. Yes, there by the light of their lantern, they saw her footmarks deep on the wet earth border by the laurel bush, which might have helped her to scale the five-foot fence. A rag from her black stuff gown hung on a bare fork of the old laurel. There was a brief delay in getting the key, and then two of the men searched the lane and the river bank, while

Sedgebrook and one of the waiters went to the police-office in the town to give information about the crime.

Neither the police nor any one else could find any trace of the woman who killed St. Servian; neither that night nor afterwards. The verdict of the coroner's jury was a verdict of wilful murder against Ann Smith, the name by which the circus rider was known in her troupe, albeit in the hand-bills and posters she figured as Mademoiselle Lafontaine.

The proprietor of the show told the coroner all he knew about her. She had joined his troupe in Cork a year and a half before the date of the murder. She had had no professional training up to that time, but she was the best amateur horsewoman and the cleverest at handling a horse that he ever had to deal with. She took to *manège* riding as a duck takes to water, and she did not know the meaning of fear. He knew nothing about her history, but he believed she was rather superior to the common run of riders, and he supposed there was a screw loose somewhere.

He knew she had a devil of a temper, but he had never known her try to "knife" anybody in the show. Questioned as to her morals, he replied that she was "straight," which in his vocabulary meant that her character was unimpeachable.

But she had vanished into the December night, none knew whither; and St. Servian's family were left to mourn his untimely fate, and mourned him all the more bitterly because that fate was unavenged. Chief mourner at his funeral in the churchyard, adjoining the family seat in Hertfordshire, was his elder brother, Lord Inglethorpe, who had loved him dearly, and who took his death sorely to heart. He was hardly civil to Colonel Forrester, not being able to pardon the commanding officer for his share in the orgies which had ended in murder. The men had been friends in spite of fifteen years' difference in their ages, and Inglethorpe had confided his young brother to Forrester's protecting care, with an assurance that he would be looked after with a fatherly eye. And this had been the upshot of it all! They met and parted in icy silence, Forrester too proud to defend himself, or to say how fond he had been

of the bright, happy lad. It was from others and at a later date that Lord Inglethorpe heard how strong an attachment had existed between the colonel and the subaltern.

PART II.

Cyril St. Servian had been lying in his grave for nearly seven years when Andrew Forrester came home from his final Indian campaign, and hung up his sword in an old manor house in Essex. He was General Forrester now, and he felt that after six and twenty years of active service he could afford to take life quietly, and to taste the bliss of idle days. He might marry, perhaps, he told himself, if he could but meet with any sensible well-bred woman who would be content with such tepid affection as he had it in him to offer. He had been in love once in his life, but that was twenty years ago. His love story had come to a bad end, and the memory of it was like the memory of a nightmare; almost as bad as that later memory which tortured him often in his waking thoughts, and too often haunted his dreams—the vision of a fair-faced

boy with blood bedabbled lips and fading face, lying lifeless on his breast.

The two memories were curiously interwoven in Andrew Forrester's mind, for the face of the woman who had killed St. Servian had recalled the face of the woman who jilted him ten years before, jilted him to marry an old man, and to become one of the richest women in Ireland. It was in Dublin that they met and parted, and the fact that the circus rider was an Irishwoman and bore a strong resemblance to this false love of his had interested him more than he would have cared to admit. And now there was a vision of horror associated for ever with those two faces, the face of the Dublin physician's daughter, and the face of the nameless *écuyère*.

He came to London in the height of the season, and established himself at an hotel in Albemarle Street, determined to take life easily and to look about him. He had never courted smart people, or cared much for society; but he was very well known in the smart world, and invitation cards fluttered down upon him in a little shower of hospitable intentions—dinners, afternoon parties, dances, music, *ad infinitum*. General Forrester

did not dance; did not care for dining; but he loved music, and he liked the *sans gêne* of an afternoon gathering for tea and gossip, liked to sit in a comfortable armchair in a shady nook of a perfumed drawing-room, half hidden among tall palms and clustering exotics, and to look on and listen to the little world about him. In this way he contrived to see a good deal of the other sex, and, like Hamlet, he came to the conclusion that neither men nor women had any charm for him.

He was sitting in such a corner, sheltered by an azalea which was one mass of orange-coloured blossom, when he heard a name that had a painful interest for him.

"So your friend, Lord Inglethorpe, is going to be married?" said an elderly gentleman to the lady of the house.

"Yes, at last. It is a miracle that he has been allowed to remain a bachelor so long."

"It has not been for want of trying on the part of the women," said an obese matron, who had set her three daughters at his lordship in succession. "And, of course, like all those men who set up for woman-haters, he is going to marry very badly?"

"Badly? Is the lady really not nice?"

"Oh, I suppose she is nice enough. There is nothing to be said against her character or her looks; but she is a nobody, and an Irish nobody, which makes the matter worse."

"I was told she was a woman of good family."

"I don't know what you mean by good family; Irishmen are all descended from Brian Borhuma or Cormac MacCullenan. I am told the lady's father was a Dublin physician, an ardent disciple of O'Connell's, and a rank rebel against all English institutions. Her sister married Sir Henry Peterson, one of the richest men in Ireland—made his money in trade at Belfast, and owned an immense estate in Kerry—and was left a widow a few years after her marriage. But I dare say you know Lady Peterson?"

"I used to know her very well," answered the lady of the house; "but she has lived abroad so much of late that we have rarely met."

"Ah, you will hear of her soon, no doubt. She has taken a house in Berkeley Square. I suppose with a view to the sister's wedding."

"Lady Peterson must be nearly forty. The sister will be rather an elderly bride, I take it."

"Well, she is not in her girlhood, I am told; but there is a vast difference in the ages of the sisters—only half-sisters, I believe—and the young one is reported to be gloriously handsome. I am dying to see her."

General Forrester was even more anxious than this expiring lady. Sir Henry Peterson's widow had once been Flora Botillier, and his promised wife. He was curious to see what she was like after seventeen years of severance; whether any of the old charm still remained; and whether there would be pleasure or pain for him in meeting her.

He told himself that there could be only pleasure, the calm and mild pleasure of recalling a youthful dream. Love and pain, so far as Flora Botillier was concerned, belonged to the past. He had done with both. He had another reason for wanting to see her. He was anxious to discover if he had deceived himself as to that resemblance between the physician's daughter and the circus rider,

whether his false love was or was not like the beautiful shrew who killed Cyril St. Servian.

No trace had ever been found of the murderess. The police had failed utterly in discovering her, or in finding out how she had contrived to get clear of Lowford. She had not been seen at the railway station, and it was almost an assured fact that she had not left the neighbourhood by the railway. The search had been too prompt and too careful to allow of the possibility that she had been anywhere in hiding within walking distance of the cathedral city. There remained only the river, on which there was a good deal of mercantile traffic between south and north, and the Lowford police were of opinion that she must have got away by the river. A start of an hour there would have saved her.

General Forrester was in his stall at Covent Garden less than a week after that tea-party in Eaton Square. Patti was singing in the "Barbière," and the house wore its most brilliant aspect—rank and beauty, diamonds, hot-house flowers, soft plumage of ostrich, tender

grace of sapphires and pearls—an audience to delight the soul of the æsthete and fill the manager's treasury.

"There is Lord Inglethorpe with his *fiancée*, Miss Botillier," said a voice in the stall behind Forrester. "Fine woman, ain't she?"

Forrester had been exploring one side of the house with his glass when the man behind him spoke. He turned now to the other, and in a large box on the grand tier he saw two women seated in state, with Inglethorpe sitting a little in the background by the side of the younger of the two.

They were dressed alike in amber brocade, and each had a large posy of bright yellow orchids upon the velvet cushion in front of her. Both were strikingly handsome, but the charms of the elder had been amplified by time, and the neck which blazed with diamonds was of Rubensesque proportions. The unmarried sister wore no jewels. Her form and face were alike faultless, and her dark hair was piled in a great knot on the top of her head, with the suggestion of a helmet—just as she had worn it one December midnight at the supper after the circus.

Yes, it was she and none other. That commanding figure and that splendid face belonged to the termagant who murdered Cyril St. Servian: and the murderess was going to marry Cyril's brother!

"The marriage must be stopped somehow," Forrester said to himself, "and it is my business to stop it."

He went up to Lady Peterson's box by-and-by, as a preliminary move. He wanted to see how Miss Botillier would receive him. What cool audacity to be sitting there in the blaze of the lamps, before an audience of many hundreds—she, who had been hunted like a wild beast in the east of England—she, whose swan-like throat was forfeited to the hangman. She wore no ornament of any kind upon the marble smoothness of that full round throat. Perhaps she felt that a hempen necklace was the only decoration to which she had any right.

Inglethorpe and he had parted coldly after the boy's funeral; Lady Peterson and he had parted as lovers part when one of the two has turned traitor; but he went into the box with his easiest air, trusting to time for having worn

away all the rough edges between him and his old friends. His confidence was not ill-judged. Lady Peterson received him with her most gracious smiles, and made room for him between her and her sister. Lord Inglethorpe was full of friendliness. He was evidently in that state of blissful subjugation in which a man overflows with beneficence towards all creation. He could not remember that he had ever thought ill of an old friend. He grasped Forrester's hand.

"Dear old fellow, how glad I am to see you again!" he exclaimed. "I want to introduce you to Miss Botillier, my future wife. Sibyl, this is General Forrester, one of my oldest friends—a friend of my poor brother's."

"Yes, St. Servian was very dear to me," said the general, saluting the lady with a distant bow.

She met his cold and steady gaze with eyes as steady as his own; but he knew that she recognized him, and that the scene of St. Servian's death was as clear a vision before her eyes as it was before his. She looked at him in her splendid beauty with her head held

high, her lovely lips quivering faintly for a few seconds and then growing firm as marble. If she had been lovely years ago in her shabby black stuff gown, with all the traces of fatigue and a hard life upon her face and form, she was twice as beautiful to-night, in her rich and picturesque dress, and with the silken softness of modern luxury surrounding her. Inglethorpe looked at her adoringly, so rapt a worshipper that he failed to note the coldness of Forrester's greeting.

The general did not protract his visit.

"How soon is the wedding to be?" he asked in a low voice, as Inglethorpe opened the door of the box for him.

"In three weeks—to-morrow three weeks, at St. George's. You'll come, won't you, Forrester? I'll tell Lady Peterson to send you a card."

"You're very good. I'm rather too glum a figure for a smart wedding."

"Nonsense. You must be there, or I shall think you don't care a straw for me."

"There goes the curtain. Good night," said Forrester.

"In three weeks!" he said to himself as he went downstairs and out of the theatre, being in too dark a mood for Patti and Rossini. "In three weeks! I had better wake him from his dream at once. God help him, poor fellow! It will be a rough waking."

Next morning brought him two letters from Berkeley Square. One was delivered by a footman. A large envelope, containing a large card, printed in silver, inviting him to be present at the marriage of Lord Inglethorpe and Sibyl Botillier, and to a reception in Berkeley Square after the ceremony. The other letter came by post, and was dated midnight.

"I must see you," it began abruptly. "I must know at once what you mean to do. I shall be near the north gate in Berkeley Square, at two o'clock to-day, and I entreat you to come there at that hour. The square will be almost empty, and we can talk unobserved. If you have any pity for a remorseful sinner, come!"

There was no signature, and the hand was unfamiliar, but he had not an instant's doubt as to the writer. Yes, he would go, and tell her that he intended to prevent her marriage with

the brother of her victim. That should not be. He would give her fair warning, and advise her to take the initiative. It would be easy for her to break off the match. She would be dealing no worse with Inglethorpe than her sister had dealt with him, Andrew Forrester, for a much lighter motive.

He was at the north gate of Berkeley Square as St. James's church struck two, and a tall woman plainly dressed in black, almost as plainly as when she was Joan of Arc, was waiting to unlock the gate and let him in. They walked side by side for some minutes in silence. She was right as to the solitude of the enclosure at that hour. Children and nurses had all gone to dinner; schoolroom misses had gone to lunch. There was no one but a gardener solemnly rolling the gravel, and not taking too much out of himself in the operation.

"Are you going to tell him?" she asked, abruptly.

"That depends upon you. I am going to prevent your becoming his wife."

"You are? My God! do you know how I love him?"

"Judging by my brief, but fatal, experience of your character, I should think you must be more capable of savage hatred than of love."

"Oh, I was a wretch that night! The devil had hold of me. I had no power over myself. Yes, for that one instant I *meant* to kill him. It was not manslaughter, an unlucky random blow. I meant death. Remorse, repentance, bitterest, bitterest repentance, came a few minutes afterwards, came while I was rushing blindly through the night. 'My God, my God!' I cried, 'don't let him die; save him, spare him, O God of mercy and forgiveness!' But my prayers were useless. I was too vile a sinner for my cry to reach the Almighty."

"I fancy you must have thought more of saving your own skin," said the general, harshly, "or you would hardly have got clean off as you did."

He was determined not to be cajoled by her, not to be hoodwinked by the marble whiteness of her beauty, by the thrilling tones of her voice, which were more tragic than all he had ever known of stage tragedy.

"I was deadly frightened," said she. "Yes, I

suppose I thought of myself and of getting away. I scrambled over the fence somehow, and ran down the lane, and along the muddy path by the river—ran faster than I had ever run in my life before, I believe, till I came to a lock where there was a barge waiting to go through. There was only one light on board the barge, and the stern, where a man stood steering, was all dark. The hull was close against the bank. I had only to slip from the edge of the pathway on to the deck. No one noticed me in the darkness. I laid myself down behind a pile of timber, and the lock gates opened slowly and the barge went down into the dark pit inside, and then glided slowly out into the river, and on through the blackness of that hideous night. And then I thought I was safe. I had read about stowaways, and I kept close in the shadow of the timber, till the barge stopped at Hull in the grey, cold morning, and then I contrived to slip away while the men were on shore, and while there were only a couple of miserable women in the cabin getting breakfast ready, too busy to see me. I had a little money, and I got on board a steamer that was to sail for Hamburg that afternoon, and in Hamburg

—but you won't care to know what became of me after I got away?"

"Yes, tell me everything. I want to befriend you if I can, on the one condition that your engagement to Inglethorpe is cancelled. Tell me how you ever came to be leading that miserable life, with those far from reputable women. Tell me how Dr. Botillier's daughter ever came to ride in a circus."

"Temper—my miserable, ungovernable temper—the temper that afterwards made me a murderess. My father died five years after Flora's marriage, and my mother, who was his second wife, and many years his junior, married again. My stepfather was Orange to the core of his heart, hated the Nationalists, and ridiculed their views. I had been steeped in Nationalism from my cradle, and I hated him from the very beginning of our new life. He was never kind to me, and my mother was imbecile in her subjection to him, and jealous of his attentions to other women. Our home was a hell upon earth. She had been left comfortably off by my father, but she had taken no trouble to protect her fortune from a husband's extravagance. Captain

Fitzwarren squandered her money, ridiculed her friends, and made her miserable. She was utterly cowed, and the sight of her weakness roused all that was most violent in my nature. Things went from bad to worse, and one day when we were living in a furnished house at Queenstown I ran away from this wretched home, and engaged myself to the manager of a travelling circus. I had been used to horses from my babyhood, for the chief delight of my father's life, outside his profession, was in his stable. He taught me to ride, and to adore horses; and I used to watch the entrance of the circus people from my nursery windows, and, even in those happy days, I longed to be among them. So you see, when temper drove me away from home and respectability, it was a natural thing for me to take refuge in a circus."

She paused for a minute or so, and they walked on under the summer trees, while St. James's clock chimed the first quarter, and the sound of wheels in Piccadilly rose and fell like the murmur of a distant sea.

"I needn't tell you what my life in the circus was like. You saw me and my companions, and

can judge for yourself. When I found myself in Hamburg with only a few shillings between me and starvation, my courage failed me. My whole nature seemed changed after that fatal night. I could not stir without fancying I was followed, without expecting the touch of a hand upon my shoulder, and my days and nights were haunted by the vision of my victim's face, in that one flash of time when he looked up at me with the knife in his breast.

"I wrote to my sister, who was always good natured, and who was rich and independent. My letter was a tissue of lies, but you can't suppose that a murderess could afford to tell the truth. I told her that I had been getting my living as a nursery governess in a Jewish family, that I had quarrelled with my mistress, and that she had left me in Hamburg penniless, while she and her brood went on to Kissengen. I knew Flora's careless temperament well enough to know that she would never take the trouble to inquire into my story. She answered my letter by sending me a ten-pound note and ordering me to go to her at her country place as fast as steamer and train would carry me. I went, and

she bewailed my wretched looks, and prophesied that I should never be handsome enough to make a decent marriage. For a year or more I fulfilled her prophecy, for I was wretchedly ill most of the time, and a most miserable-looking creature. Flora was wonderfully good to me, disapproved of what she called my nursery-governessing, but approved of my running away from home. My poor mother died soon afterwards, and Captain Fitzwarren took possession of the remnant of her fortune, leaving me entirely dependent on my sister. I have nothing more to tell except that just six months ago I met Lord Inglethorpe at a ball—where I went because Flora insisted upon taking me into society, rather than for any pleasure I felt in such entertainments—and from that hour a new life began for me. His goodness, his noble character, were a revelation. I never knew what happiness meant till I knew that he loved me. I love him as I never thought to love mortal man. Don't tell me that you are going to part us."

"I am not going to let him marry the woman who killed his brother."

"One moment, one single moment of wicked-

ness: and I am to pay for it with the loss of a life-time of bliss! Is that fair, do you think?"

"That one moment extinguished a bright young life. I saw the boy's widowed mother standing beside his grave. However miserable you may be in parting with your lover, your misery cannot be greater than hers was that day, and for many a day after. I know that her son's unhappy death shortened her life. Her grey hairs went down in sorrow to the grave—because of that one moment of yours."

She shivered at this reproof, and then, deadly pale, with clasped hands and streaming eyes, she turned to him in her despair.

"Don't part us!" she pleaded. "I love him, I love him! No other woman can make his life happier than I would make it. Don't come between me and my dear love!"

"And if I hold my peace and let him marry you, some day, perhaps, you will stab him as you stabbed his brother, in another unlucky moment."

"No, I am changed now. Love has tamed me. I can never feel again as I felt then. Think of the life I had been leading among those circus

people! Think of the hard work, the sleepless nights, the worry and hopelessness of my existence! My brain was ready to take fire at a word. I am not the same woman. Why am I to suffer for her sin, that woman of seven years ago?"

The argument seemed almost plausible. He had noted the change in her, the subjugation of her defiant pride, the softer light in her eyes last night when she turned them upon her lover. Yes, it was true, no doubt, she loved him with the intensity with which such passionate natures love. Hers was the hate of hate, and hers the love of love. She was a creature made up of fire and imagination. It seemed a hard thing to part such lovers: and yet it would be a harder thing to let Inglethorpe take this woman to his breast, her soul stained with his brother's blood.

"There is no help for it," he said. "It is my duty to tell Lord Inglethorpe the plain truth, bitter as it may be for him to hear, hard as it may be for me to tell. There is no help for it. If I were told to hold my peace there are others who know your story. Mostyn and Sedgebrook, the two other men who were at that accursed supper, are living, and one of them, Mostyn, is

about in London. You may meet him any day of your life, and he may denounce you."

"He would not recognize me, or if he did, I would deny my identity with that wretched circus woman. I would lie through thick and thin."

"You could not help yourself if once an investigation were set on foot. You would have to show what you did with your life between the time you left Queenstown and your arrival at your sister's house."

"Yes: if they began to investigate; if my lover were turned into my judge, Heaven help me!"

"You had better take the initiative," said Forrester. "Act as an honourable woman ought to act. Either confess the truth to your lover, or make some excuse for breaking off your engagement."

"An excuse! Let him think that I never cared for him, or that I like some one else better! Oh, my darling, how can I do that, when I love the very ground you walk upon?"

"Your fate is a hard one, Miss Botillier, but you must remember it might have been a great deal harder, and you might now be expiating your fatal act in Portland Prison."

"Yes, a felon, in a grey gown, with cropped hair, picking oakum, I suppose. *That* would not be half so hard as to have loved and been loved by Inglethorpe, and to be obliged to give him up. I should have kissed the rod, knowing that I deserved my fate."

"Good-bye," said the general, feeling that they might go on talking all day, and yet be no nearer any solution of the lady's difficulty.

She would have to dree her weird.

He held out his hand, but she would not take it.

"You have no mercy upon me, and I hate you," she said.

She went back to the gate with him, unlocked it, and saw him pass out, in absolute silence. He had never seen such marble pallor, but she had wiped away her tears, and her features had assumed a rigid tranquillity, as of a woman incapable of feeling warmly upon any subject, a woman of strong character and icy temperament.

Inglethorpe passed him as he left the square, passed him with friendly but hurried greeting, and went, smiling and eager, towards his divinity.

"Will she tell him to-day?" wondered Forrester.

The days went by, and there was no rumour of any hitch in the engagement between Lord Inglethorpe and Miss Botillier. The lovers were to be seen everywhere, usually accompanied by Lady Peterson, who had severe ideas of a chaperon's duty—occasionally alone. The young lady's trousseau had been exhibited to a few chosen friends, and had been written about in the society papers. Smart people were begging tickets for the marriage ceremony. Every seat in the spacious, old-fashioned church was bespoken. An Irish bishop, a connection of the Botilliers, was to officiate, assisted by an Irish rector, who was more nearly related to the bride.

General Forrester met the lady and her lover more than once during this interval; but there was no private speech between him and Sibyl Botillier. Their talk was for the ears of society, and they spoke only of trifles light as air.

"Obstinate fury!" he said to himself, angry at her audacity; "she means to defy me, and I shall

have to tell Inglethorpe upon the eve of his wedding. She makes it so much the harder for him by her obduracy."

All went as on velvet, Inglethorpe more and more in love, more and more enraptured with his sweetheart. She had moments of tearful tenderness in which her beauty seemed almost seraphic. Once, at parting, she hung about his neck in a passion of tears, and entreated him to believe in her love, to believe that it was for him she cared, for him alone, that although she was only a poor Irish girl, exalted and distinguished by his love, his coronet and his wealth were as dross to her. She loved him, and him only.

"You will believe that always, dearest," she sobbed. "I entreat you to believe."

"Dear love, I have never doubted."

Perhaps she meant to tell him that day, when she followed him to the threshold of the drawing-room, and hung upon him with kisses and tears; but about that fatal past her lips were dumb.

Three days before the wedding-day, Inglethorpe invited his *fiancée* and her chaperon to accompany

him to his country seat. Certain improvements, about which he had consulted Sybil at the beginning of their engagement, had just been completed, and he wanted her to see and approve. Inglethorpe Hall was in the prettiest part of Hertfordshire, within an hour's journey from London, and his lordship arranged that they should leave Euston at eleven and go back to town late in the afternoon. Lady Peterson expressed herself delighted at the idea of getting out of the smoke for a whole summer day.

"It is delightful to go northward, for once in a way," she said approvingly, when she was established in a saloon carriage, with *Punch* and the *World*, and a basket of strawberries on the table in front of her, and Lord Inglethorpe full of those *petits soins* which handsome, middle-aged matrons love. "One is so tired of the western road, Ascot, Henley, and the rest of it. This is a voyage into the unknown."

The unknown, as represented by Inglethorpe Hall, proved a fine old Tudor manor-house, furnished and decorated in perfect keeping with its style and period. Everything had been prepared to do honour to the future mistress. The

drawing-rooms and morning-room were full of flowers. The house had that air of occupation, without which the finest house is dreary.

"It is the most lovable, liveable place I ever beheld," cried Lady Peterson. "Why don't you admire things, Sibyl, instead of standing there like a stone?"

"Dear love, I am afraid you are ill," said Inglethorpe, who had watched her uneasily all the way from Euston. "You have been so strangely silent."

"I am a little tired after the ball last night," Sibyl answered quietly.

"Is that all? You generally seem as if Mercury had lent you his sandals and fatigue were unknown to you. Shall we go for a stroll in the gardens before lunch? We have half an hour to spare. Lady Peterson would like to rest in this shady room, perhaps, after the drive in the glare of that hot high-road."

"What a broad hint," cried the lady, laughing. "But you are quite correct in divining my sensations. I would much rather sit on that lovely old sofa by those delicious roses and read my *Times*, than explore the finest

grounds in Hertfordshire. I dare say yours are the finest."

"They don't pretend to vie with Hatfield," said Inglethorpe; "but I am not going to keep Sibyl in the hot parterres all the time. I want to show her our old Saxon church, and the churchyard where my father and mother lie under the daisies, and my young brother's grave. They were the first of our race who were buried in the churchyard, in sun and shade, instead of in the gloomy vault under the chancel."

"You won't think I want to give you a melancholy morning, will you, dearest?" he said presently, when he and Sibyl had made the round of the rose garden, and were crossing a shaded lawn, beyond which there was a little gate that opened into the churchyard. They could see the grey church tower above the dark branches of a venerable yew.

"No," she answered quietly; "I should like to see your brother's grave."

"That's my dear one. I only want to make you familiar with the things which are dear and sacred to me. I adored my mother, and I was very fond of her darling, our poor Cyril, whose

sad ending you have heard. He was such a fine young fellow, marked out for a splendid career, we all thought, in our foolish pride."

She answered not a word, but walked by his side across the close-cut turf to the low old wall, overgrown with lichen and ivy, which divided God's acre from man's pleasure grounds. She followed him silently into the solemn old churchyard, much darkened by spreading yew trees, and cypress and deodara.

The family burial-place of the Inglethorpes was within a low enclosure of granite and iron. There was room for six graves, and three only were occupied. There was a plain marble cross at the head of each of these three, and the simple mounds below were covered with grass. No village tradesman's grave could have been less pretentious. Sibyl looked at the three crosses, one after another, and stopped at the last of the three.

In Loving Memory of
CYRIL ST. SERVIAN,
who was cruelly murdered
December 19, 1867,
in the Twentieth Year of his Age.

She knelt down beside the narrow mound and

laid her lips against the cross, and kissed it, not once but many times, sobbing convulsively all the while.

"Sibyl, dearest, don't grieve," murmured her lover, leaning over her. "Dear love, I cannot bear to see you so distressed. I was wrong to bring you here."

"No, no, no. You were right, you were wise. No other place so fit as this. I thank God and you for bringing me here. It had to be done. It had to be done, and time was hastening so. The days were so swift, so swift. Inglethorpe," she said, rising suddenly, and standing straight before him, with one hand upon the marble cross, "You and I can never be man and wife. We must part, my dearest and best. We had better part here and now. It was I who killed him!"

EPILOGUE.

THERE are men who can love many women and forget easily. Lord Inglethorpe was not one of these. He disappeared from society immediately after the sudden and mysterious postponement of his wedding—postponed indefinitely, and without any explanation of the cause. Instead of allowing himself to be hunted by match-making mothers, he was heard of by-and-by as employed in hunting lions on the shores of the Zambesi. He came back to England a few years later; but the fever-fiend had proved a worse foe than the lions, and he returned only to die.

In a lovely valley in Brittany there is an old moated château, where a white-haired soldier and his handsome wife live far away from all the pomps and vanities of this world. The elderly husband is a chronic invalid, and the wife is his devoted nurse, as well as the nurse and benefac-

tress of all the sick poor in the neighbourhood. It is a life of placid monotony, not free from care, for the wife knows that the Destroyer may come like a thief in the night, and that there may be swift and sudden parting between her and that good man who alone knows the dark secret of her life, and who loved and protected her in her day of hopeless sorrow, when she rose from a sick bed to find herself alone in the world, since even her sister was disinclined to have any further dealings with a young woman whose caprice had lost her a devoted lover and a splendid position in society.

"What you and Inglethorpe could have quarrelled about that summer morning I have never been able to imagine," said Lady Peterson. "He came into the morning-room, looking as white as a ghost, and told me quietly that all was at an end between you. And what a pleasant thing it was for me to have to face my friends after such an affair as that!"

General Forrester found Sibyl Botillier the pale ghost of her former self, and divined the situation after half an hour in Lady Peterson's drawing-room. Sibyl was friendless and hope-

less, and it was his interference which had brought her to this pass. He followed her to Brittany, where she found a quiet home for herself in a French family of modest means but ancient lineage. He bought a small estate in the neighbourhood, affecting to prefer the climate and scenery to England, and here he watched over her fate for the next two years; with sublime patience and self-abnegation, and at the end of that time he asked her to be his wife.

"I don't expect you ever to love me," he said. "I know that to you I must always seem a cruel enemy."

"No, you only did your duty," she answered meekly. "There was a time when I hated you; but afterwards I felt that you were right. I think even if you had not urged me to acknowledge my crime my own conscience would have spoken. I could not have married him with that boy's blood between us. But pray don't talk to me of love or marriage. I can never forget that I was to have been Inglethorpe's wife."

Forrester was not importunate. He only stood aside and waited, believing that his day

must come, that she would feel the loneliness of her life too great a burden, and would turn to him for shelter and companionship, knowing that he loved her.

His day came at last, but he was almost an old man, and the doctors had told him that he had organic heart-disease, when Sibyl Botillier laid her hand in his and said—

"Let me be your nurse, and faithful companion, if you can trust me with your life."

"Trust you!" he echoed; "I have loved you with all the strength of my soul ever since that fatal night when you sat by my side at supper. I would have given my life to save you from the penalty of your crime, and I think you know me well enough to know that I acted in obedience to my conscience and my honour when I urged you to break off your engagement to Inglethorpe."

IT IS EASIER FOR A CAMEL.

I KNEW a man who used to say that most of the good things of life come to us in the long run; only they come too late. Aldermanic feastings and *petit dîners soignés* come when the jaded appetite flags unresponsive at the board; and the time when our doctor forbids us anything better than dry sherry is just that period of our lives when we could afford to take our morning bath in Heidsieck, or flood our local drinking-fountain with Mumm. Beauty smiles upon us most graciously when those that look out of the windows are dim; and society most ardently pursues us with its invitations when our shattered nerves shrink shudderingly from the very atmosphere of the fashionable crowd.

Stanhope Redwood's fate was a curious exemplification of my friend's theory. For a round half century the staple of his life was what

the people in old comedies call humdrum. He had been called to the Bar, and had rusted in chambers for twenty years before it dawned upon his somewhat sluggish mind that it was not in him to become a successful advocate, and that his life in those dusty old rooms was a vain shadow. He was without ties of any kind, and he had enough to live upon, comfortably, after his simple fashion; so he removed himself and his modest library—in which there were very few law books—from the Temple to a quiet—deadly quiet — street adjoining Manchester Square, where he fell upon his feet, *i.e.* into the power of a really honest landlady and her butler-husband, who took complete possession of him, administered to his comfort, as only well-trained servants can, and who studied his interests even while studying their own.

Redwood was a tall, ungainly man, with stooping shoulders, grey hair and grey moustache, kindly eyes, dark and of a dog-like gentleness, under shaggy projecting brows. He was not very fond of society, and society cared very little about him. Now and then an old friend's wife would ask him to a dinner-party

at suspiciously short notice, when there was a gap in the festive board, and a happy inspiration suggested Redwood. He was gentlemanlike, inoffensive, and of a good old family; a man who could be questioned adroitly about his late uncle's hounds when the talk was of hunting, or could have his memory called upon for an account of his aunt's Queen Anne silver when somebody admired the ice-spoons.

Stanhope had been supremely happy in Dusk Street for just eleven years when fate remembered him. He liked his lodgings, he adored his landlady, who was also his cook, and knew his gastronomic tastes to the measure of a grain of salt. He thought his rooms perfection, and was boastful of them when a friend dined with him. They were three in number, consisting of a front drawing-room, with three narrow deep-set windows; a middle room, with one window, looking into a stone yard, and overshadowed by a titanic wall belonging to ducal stables. This somewhat sepulchral chamber served for study and dining-room; and beyond was Mr. Redwood's bedroom, also commanding said yard and wall, by a side view.

Everything in these apartments was the perfection of neatness. Instinctive good taste had guided the butler's wife in the selection of her furniture, and in the arrangement of her few inexpensive ornaments and Bartolozzi engravings. There was always a vase of fresh flowers upon the bachelor's table. His newspapers were always cut and aired for him. The ex-butler valeted him to perfection, and, being a thrifty man, cleaned his lodger's boots with his own hands, and thus garnered the weekly half-crown paid for that operation. Happy was the landlord who had such a lodger; happy the lodger who had such a landlord.

Mr. Redwood was for the most part a silent man, shy and reticent in mixed company; but with an intimate friend he would discourse with eloquent prosiness upon certain favourite subjects; and in these friendly hours of expansiveness it never occurred to him that he had been repeating the same platitudes periodically for the last thirty years.

One of his topics was the potentialities of wealth. That was a theme upon which this temperate-living gentleman was never weary of

expatiating. The polysyllable "potentiality" had a charm for him. He smacked his lips as he pronounced it.

"The potentialities of wealth—say a round million—wisely administered, are stupendous," he would say, leaning back in his chair, with his finger-tips neatly joined, and feeling that he was only second to Coleridge as a philosophical conversationalist. "Consider what the owner of a million might do. Suppose him a philanthropist, he might clothe all the ragged children in London. Their clothes would wear out, you say? Well, no doubt they would; but, the ball set rolling, other millionaires would follow in the same path. He might subsidize a theatre—a great national theatre—for the performance of the legitimate drama, with a nightly change of bill; so that the man who looked to the stage for education and culture might take an annual *abonnement* and go to that theatre every night. Were my millionaire, on the other hand, the mere selfish sensualist, what renown, frivolous and petty, yet world-wide, he might win for himself by having the best house and giving the best dinners in London! The man who can do

that lives for ever in the traditions of his country, and is handed down from age to age—as Vitellius with his nightingales' tongues—surely a most insipid *entrée*—or Dartineuf with his ham pie—the very thought of which gives me *mal au cœur*."

Like most men who know no language but their native English, and the scanty Latin of their adolescence, Stanhope had a *penchant* for French phrases, picked up parrot-wise from other parrots.

He had prosed about the potentialities for thirty years, when one of those good things which so often come too late came his way, and the shape it bore was three millions sterling. He awoke from the placid sleep of rectitude to find a lawyer's letter on the little silver tray that held his morning cup of tea, and the letter told him that a distant relation in the Chicago pork trade, had left him three millions—not of francs—not of dollars even—but of sterling sovereigns, represented by unimpeachable securities. He knew that an uncle of his mother's had run away from the starched gentilities of an uncongenial home and had gone to America, and, as it was

supposed, to the American dogs. The pork butcher's existence was a surprise, and he was almost ashamed of the pork, though his bosom burned at the thought of three millions—and the Potentialities.

What should he do with this wealth? With what great and noble scheme should he ally his name, and inscribe himself for ever upon fame's muster-roll? Benevolence whispered, "Feed the hungry and clothe the naked."

It was the beginning of winter: weather prophets were darkly prophecying; East-end clergymen were writing to the papers with piteous tales of want and famine. With one of his millions he might put warm garments upon all those shivering backs, good shoes upon those bare feet. But then one of his three millions would be GONE. He turned cold at the thought. With three millions he was a man of exceptional wealth. With two he would be a commonplace personage in comparison. With one he would be a nobody. Society would hardly concern itself about him. After all, there is no margin in any specified sum of money for titanic charities. To do that kind of thing a man must

have a silver mine, an inexhaustible lode of precious metal. He lay in his bed and thought of what he could, would, should, or might do, till his head ached, and he felt as if he were the subjunctive mood incarnate. Then a happy thought came upon him like a burst of sunlight on a dark day.

To give is to pauperize and degrade the working classes. To spend is to stimulate flagging trade and furnish employment for labour. He would not give; he would spend—spend largely, judiciously, and on himself, since, after all, the three millions belonged to *him*. Thus he would secure the maximum of enjoyment, and do the maximum of good to his fellow-creatures. He pictured Spitalfields weavers singing at their looms as they wove his costly curtains; cabinet makers whistling as they carved and inlaid his Italian buffets, his early English book-cases; farmers rubbing their hands at the improvement in oats, brought about by his model stables and numerous stud; frame-makers choking themselves with gold-dust, as they made his picture-frames. There was no end to that bright perspective of labour.

He would have the most perfect house in London. He would import the most distinguished *chèf* from Paris. His carriages should be the talk of the town; his picture-gallery should eclipse that of his neighbour in the square. He felt it a hardship that he could not have Mr. Holford's house in Park Lane; or the Duke of Portland's in Cavendish Square. He wanted something colossal, and his choice would have lain between those two.

Should he build? No; too slow. And after considering all the largest houses in London, he began to think that a small house would be more *distingué*, more *chic*. For a bachelor to establish himself in a palace would be an ostentatious display of wealth, and might lead to his living beyond his income. No, he would have a small house and a modest establishment; but the house should be as costly and as brilliant as a jewel; brilliant with a subdued light, mark you, like the deeply purple radiance of a fine sapphire. His liveries should be simplicity itself, but of a perfection in cut and quality only attained by mortal tailor under the utmost pressure. His plate, carpets, furniture, every-

thing should be made on purpose for him. All his table glass should come from Venice—a man must be cosmopolitan—but his crockery should re-animate industry in Worcester. His crest and monogram should be on everything. He had too long eaten with forks bearing the bloated "B" of the Bakers, his landlord and landlady.

His installation would be a lengthy process. The house he wanted—the archetypal house—would be as difficult to find as the four-leafed shamrock; and then would come the furnishing. Even the stimulating power of his cheque-book would scarcely achieve what he wanted in less than six months. And what was he to do with himself in the interval?

Stay here, in the rooms where he had lived so cosily for so many years, in the bed where Mrs. Baker had nursed his little bronchial attacks and gouty twinges like a mother! Stay here, and look out at that yard and side-long prospect of dead wall! Stay here, where even Mrs. Baker's scrupulous cleanliness could not disguise the shabbiness of the furniture! Stay at such a *démodé* address as Dusk Street, he, one

of the richest men in London! It was not to be thought of. He must live at an hotel till his house was ready. The hotel of the day, wherever it might be.

He would be sorry to part from these good Bakers, whose devotion had been equal to that of old family servants. Should he engage them to superintend his new *ménage*, to look after his little comforts, see that he was not cheated? No, they were too old. Their ideas were narrow and antiquated. He must cut with the Bakers.

Baker came in with his shaving water, poked the fire, which was lighted at seven o'clock to the minute on every morning from the first of November to the first of April, and made things ready for his patron's toilet.

"Baker, I am going to leave you," said Mr. Redwood, and then proceeded to explain how he had had a fortune left him, and was going to stop at an hotel, as more convenient and central, while he was choosing and furnishing a house.

Baker took the shock with respectful fortitude, but it was a shock. He and his wife had always thought and talked of Mr. Redwood as a fixture.

Baker looked forward to the honour of following him to the grave from that house.

"I am sorry, sir, you can't make it agreeable to stay with us while you are making your choice and ordering your furniture," he said gently. "Mrs. Baker might be of some assistance to you in your selections. She has a good eye for carpets."

"My good fellow, every carpet in my house will be made for me, to my architect's original design," said Redwood, writhing at the suggestion. "Of course I am sorry to leave you. I have been extremely comfortable here; but your rooms are so infernally small. I feel as if your ceiling were coming down upon my head."

He dressed hurriedly, and went out without his breakfast, albeit Mrs. Baker had fried him a sole as he had been wont to think she, and only she, could fry soles. He went first to Lincoln's Inn Fields—reckless in engaging a hansom, though careful to give the man no more than his legal fare. He saw the lawyers, who bowed down and worshipped him, assuring him that there never was a succession involving less

difficulty, and that he might consider himself to all intents and purposes already possessed of the money.

One of the partners read him a long schedule of securities. Most of the railways or other companies nominated therein were utterly unknown to him; but both partners pledged themselves to the soundness of the stock.

"Your kinsman was one of the keenest financiers in the United States," said the senior partner. "You need have no fear as to his investments."

He took another hansom—having carefully avoided keeping the first waiting—and drove to his club, a sleepy old club, where the furniture and the members were all on the same dead level of elderly shabbiness; and yet some of the members were county, and some were Horse-guards. He ordered breakfast, though it was far on towards luncheon time, and while he was coquetting with an egg—having no appetite—one of his old friends came in, and drifted into a chair near him, in friendly vacuity of mind.

"What have you been doing to yourself, Red-

wood?" he asked. "You look uncommonly seedy."

"Oh, I'm quite well, thank you, never better in my life. I feel a great deal stronger than I felt this time last year, but I'm a little anxious. I—the fact is I've had some money left me, and that will necessitate a change in my way of living; and I've stuck to those old rooms of mine——"

"Like a limpet to a rock—and very nice rooms they are. I've always envied you: a little too far from the club for me, perhaps, but as rooms I call them perfection. And so you're going to change. Is it a very good thing you've dropped into?"

"Yes, it's rather large," Redwood answered nervously, as if he were afraid the shock might be too much for his friend. "It's three millions."

"Three what?" roared the other man. "You mean three pound ten."

"Three—millions—sterling!" said Redwood, doggedly.

His friend uttered the biggest oath he could command.

"My dear fellow, I congratulate you. What a stupendous fortune! What a great career you have before you! I only wish, for your own sake, you were younger; and I wish for everybody's sake," with a touch of tenderness, "you were looking better."

"Don't harp upon my looks, Goldfinch. I tell you I never felt in better health than I do this winter. I want your advice in a small matter. I contemplate going into an hotel for the winter months. Which is the best in London?"

"The new one undoubtedly," exclaimed Goldfinch, who had lately read a descriptive reporter's account of an inaugural banquet, at which newspaper men and important officials had speechified, after a triumphal procession through the three hundred and sixty-five bedrooms, labelled after the days of the year, from January 1st to December 31st."

"The new one?"

"Yes; the Cyclopean, on the Thames Embankment, the most luxurious hotel ever built. All the latest inventions and improvements from New York and Paris. The hotel of the day; telephones, lifts, magnetic baths, winter gardens,

and smoking divans upon every floor. All the European papers, and in perpetual communication with all the West End theatres. You may order your oysters and Chateau-Yquem between the acts at the Lyceum, and be confident that you'll find them waiting for you when you get back to your hotel."

"I think I'll go to the Cyclopean."

"No man of means and sense would go to any other."

"I had thought that Claridge's or Limmer's might be snugger," said Redwood, irresolutely.

Since he had come into his fortune—ages ago as it appeared to him—he felt himself afflicted with a terrible indecisiveness which was almost like a disease—a morbid condition akin to St. Vitus's dance. In this state of feebleness he allowed his friend to dispose of him.

"What does a man of your colossal fortune want with snugness?" cried Goldfinch, scornfully. "You want style—novelty. You don't want an old-fashioned family hotel, and an old-fashioned family landlord fussing about you. You want splendour, magnificence — three hundred and sixty-five bedrooms, and sitting-rooms to match.

Mr. Redwood put himself into another hansom —the third shilling that morning. His head spun as he thought of this extravagance in coach hire, for him who had economized even in hailing an omnibus if it was a few yards on the wrong side of the penny limit. Why pay an extra penny for those few yards?

He drove to the Cyclopean—a monster edifice, facing the river. The titanic grandeur of the glittering grey granite Gothic porch, on porphyry pillars, almost frightened him. He shied at it, like a nervous horse, as he went tottering up the steps. A cloud of liveried porters and gentlemanly managers in plain clothes were in the echoing marble entrance hall. He was referred to an office like a bank, in order to be told that he could have rooms.

A lady in silken raiment consulted mystical numbers—as if she were performing some kind of Babylonian sortilege. It was evidently a favour to be accommodated there, although the place smelt of raw Portland stone and newly planed pitch-pine. Yes, he could have rooms on the first floor—a suite of six, if that would do.

He thought six rooms would do. A gold and

crimson lift, which realized his idea of an oriental harem as to upholstery, conveyed him past a stately entresol to the statelier first floor.

A person in authority, before whom he inwardly quailed, showed him a suite of apartments which occupied about a quarter of a mile of frontage; a dining-room like a church; a drawing-room like a picture gallery without any pictures; bedroom, dressing-room, bathroom in proportion. He was informed there would be a room for his valet in the mansarde roof.

This allusion to his valet reminded Redwood that he was unprovided with that functionary. Baker had shaved him every morning for the last eleven years; Baker had brought him his clothes and his boots in perfection; Baker had done all that the most accomplished valet can do; but in leaving Dusk Street he must renounce these unobtrusive ministrations.

"I am parting with my man," he told the hotel authority. "Perhaps you can find me a—well-trained servant, with an unexceptionable character."

"When would you require him, sir?"

"Immediately—before I dress for dinner."

"English or foreign, sir?"

"English—that is to say, I should not object to a foreigner if he spoke decent English," said Redwood, with that undecidedness which had come upon him like a malady.

"I can provide you with an excellent man, sir. He will wait upon you at six o'clock—here—or elsewhere should you desire it."

"I can see him here. These rooms are ready for me, I suppose?"

"Perfectly ready, sir," replied the polite personage, not caring to add that they had been waiting for him for exactly nine weeks since the inaugural banquet which had informed the world that the stupendous hotel was in working order.

The upper stories, especially the fifth and sixth, had filled rapidly with country cousins and men about town; but the grandiose apartments of the first and second floors hung on hand. The charge for all that splendour was prohibitive "to the general."

"In that case you can send a commissionaire

for my luggage. I'll write a note for him to take to—my people. And, ahem—you can send me a tailor—a—a tailor you would feel justified in recommending."

"I'll telephone to Mr. Condit, sir—an excellent person. I employ him myself."

Mr. Condit came and received a handsome order. It was not because Stanhope Redwood wanted clothes—his wardrobe was well supplied, and he was at an age when men hardly care to change their style and manner of dressing—but he considered it incumbent upon him to launch out a little on having come into a fortune.

The valet appeared at the stroke of six—a tall, dignified-looking personage, of about five and forty, distinctly German as to accent, yet talking admirable English. He had lived seven years with Lord Camberwell, and had previously accompanied the young Marquis of Hoxton and Highbury round the world in his steam yacht. He knew all about yachting things, Alpine things, and hunting things. Redwood thanked him blushingly for this information.

"I don't yacht, or climb, or hunt," he said. "Can you make a mustard poultice?"

The valet had no doubt he could if he tried; but he suggested that if anything in that way were wanted a trained nurse was generally available.

"I have never taken service with an invalid, sir," he said; and Redwood nervously explained that he was rarely ill, and, and—in the event of poultices being required he would make haste to procure a nurse; upon which Wolf, the valet, hired him as his master, the preliminary questions being all asked by the servant rather than by the employer. Mr. Redwood would gladly have drawn back at the last moment, and looked elsewhere for an attendant. There was a respectable severity about Wolf which chilled him to the bone; but the hotel manager had put it upon him to engage this man as a duty he owed to himself.

"You won't get such another chance in a hurry, sir," said the manager. "I know what the general run of body-servants are like. This man lived seven years with Lord Camberwell, and was as good as a father to young Lord Hoxton—stopped him from jumping overboard

more than once, when he had D. T. Sad young rip! Nobody but Wolf could have pulled him through that voyage."

Urged by these stringent arguments, Mr. Redwood allowed Wolf to engage him, and, at half-past seven, he dressed himself timorously under that searching eye. He had dined at seven o'clock hitherto, and he suffered acutely from that sensation described as "sinking;" but he thought it would shock Wolf's feelings if he ined before eight, just as it would doubtless have shocked him if he had dined in a frock coat. So at eight o'clock he sat down in faultless evening dress to his solitary meal in the dining-room that was like a church, Wolf hovering near the sideboard, and watching the waiters as if to see that they did not give his master too much to eat.

When he had nibbled an olive and sipped a glass of Mouton, Wolf approached him respectfully and asked what time he would wish to go to bed. He quailed at the question, thinking he was going to be ordered into immediate retirement, as if he had been a child again and Wolf the head nurse.

"Not before eleven, sir?" asked Wolf, as he hesitated.

"Well, no—about eleven—or perhaps——"

"Then I conclude I shall not be wanted before eleven, sir?"

"No—no—I dare say not."

"Thank you, sir."

Wolf retired, and his master, ringing for him ten minutes later to send for his cigar-case, was informed that Mr. Wolf had gone out for the evening. It was his habit to spend his evenings at his club, a German chess club.

Redwood concluded that this was customary with servants who had lived with the nobility, and he made no remonstrance. He felt very sleepy at half-past ten, worn out with the excitements of the day, but he held out till five minutes to eleven, when he found Wolf waiting for him in his electric-lighted chamber, with everything laid out for the night, and where he laid out his master, as solemnly as if he had been a royal personage lying in state. Redwood almost expected the people to come filing in to look at him, as he lay in that stately bed with its towering canopy, and satin damask curtains,

and guipure and eider-down. Needless to add that he had hardly half an hour of unbroken sleep all through the long feverish night.

There is no occasion to relate those legal processes, by which Mr. Redwood became possessed of his fortune, or rather with certain parcels of scrip which represented that vast sum of wealth. The processes were slow, and seemed slower to the somewhat irritable brain of the legatee; but there is an end to everything, and the new-year was still in its youth when Redwood felt himself the absolute owner of that fortune which at first had seemed only a magnificent dream.

Possessor of that vast wealth—vast despite of State exactions and the greed of lawyers—Mr. Redwood began to think seriously of the Potentialities. He had loved to theorize upon the things that might be done by a private individual of large means, for the amelioration of misery or the encouragement of industry and art; but when, with the money as it were in his pocket, he tried to reduce theory to practice, he found his path hedged round with difficulties. He had ventilated his ideas, as the phrase goes,

in two or three letters to popular newspapers, and he had been beseiged by visitors, inundated by correspondence. Everybody who contrived to get an introduction to him immediately introduced somebody else. His acquaintances increased by a geometrical progression. He hired a secretary to answer his letters; and the secretary was on the verge of brain fever before he had been at his post a month. Parsons of all denominations, from the most ancient orders of priesthood to the newly invented creed of yesterday, flocked about him, and unfolded their schemes of benevolence, and explained their universal panaceas; and he told them politely that he would think about their suggestions, and communicate with them hereafter. He was always thinking about other people's philanthropic propositions, or vaguely musing upon his own old dreams; but somehow or other he could not bring himself into action. The magnitude of his own ideas frightened him. He saw the first of his three millions vanishing at one fell swoop. Nay, he saw the three melt from him in a day, like the three wishes in the fairy story—vanish, and leave him poorer

than before the death of the pork butcher of Chicago.

"The postages alone would cost me a thousand pounds," he said to himself, *apropos* to a scheme that had caught his fancy, namely, the purchase of Woking Common, to be laid out in a model city for the accommodation of all the superannuated workers in Whitechapel—a haven and a shelter for those white slaves who had toiled and starved for half a century and upwards, and who were dependent upon charity—public or private—for the support of their declining years.

Every scheme suggested by philanthropy, however much it attracted him at the outset, ended by frightening him. So much money would be swallowed up in the mere machinery of setting the great work on foot. He listened to all the schemes, approved or suggested amendments, and promised to make up his mind —later. He could not make up his mind about anything; not even about his dinner, or the clothes he should wear, or the theatre to which he should go. Wolf decided all such small matters for him; and his future residence, its style and elevation, the arrangement and dimen-

sion of the rooms, the character of the furniture, were all being settled for him by his architect, who, while submitting his plans in the most reverential spirit to his Mæcenas, overruled every objection and defeated every suggestion on the part of that illustrious patron.

He stayed on at the Cyclopean, though in that gorgeous drawing-room—with its half-acre of plate glass, and its sky-blue satin curtains, its lofty frescoed ceiling, where pale pink cupids floated in a sky-blue empyrean—there was not a single chair in which he felt comfortable. Sitting by that marble curb, beside a very badly burning fire, in an elaborately artistic grate, in the majestic solitude of his evenings, he would have given a goodly slice of his income for the comfort he had left behind him in Dusk Street—the old leathern armchair which fitted him like a glove, the bright brass fender which was just the right height for his slippered feet, the cheeriness of a fire such as only Mrs. Baker could build up, ay, and even the cheeriness of Mrs. Baker's garrulity, and her twaddling gossip about the neighbours, the awful scandals in Portman Square, and the impending ruin in

Harley Street; the certainty that No. 1500, Wigmore Street, was going to divorce his pretty wife, and the shadow of bankruptcy looming in the future of the corner house in Devonshire Terrace.

Truth to say, the splendour of the Cyclopean gave Stanhope Redwood but little gratification. The size of the rooms preyed upon his nerves. He was worried by an idea of some one standing behind him—a foolish fancy no doubt, but one which nervous people are prone to feel sitting alone in a spacious room surrounded by looking-glasses.

There were evenings on which the triple millionaire felt decidedly "low;" evenings, during which he would stare into the hollow fire—the fires at the Cyclopean had a knack of burning hollow—and see himself a ruined man, drifting inevitably towards that visionary workhouse of the remote future, which is the terror of all millionaires. Those shoals of begging letters, those insidious appeals from poor relatives, and the men who had been at Marlborough with him, the old school-fellows whose name was legion, and of whose personality he

had but the faintest recollection; the energetic attacks of philanthropists and missionaries, city vicars, and political enthusiasts had frightened Stanhope Redwood into the condition of a man oppressed by nightmare. He could not move. His mind refused to act for him, numbed by that overpowering fear of making away with his fortune. The only thing he could do was to wait, and pore over his bank-book nightly. He sent Wolf to the bank for it every afternoon; partly because he had to devise some employment for that superior person; and partly because he hungered for the perusal of those pages.

The amount of his weekly account at the Cyclopean made him shudder. £69 17*s.* 9*d.* for one week's maintenance. He went into elaborate calculations upon a sheet of Cyclopean note-paper, and found that he had been living at the rate of, say, eighteen pence a minute—eighteen pence a minute for life sustained upon doubtful French eggs—misnamed new-laid—gritty toast, and indifferently cooked soles and cutlets. He had lately consulted a fashionable physician, who had pronounced him a victim to shattered nerves, and had put him, by way

of consolation, upon a Spartan regimen. He knew, as he mumbled his solitary chop and sipped his toast-water, that there were men in the great garish coffee-room below him, men of not a hundredth part of his wealth, wallowing in the Cyclopean *table d'hôte* dinner at 7*s.* 6*d.* Gusts of their brutal laughter were wafted towards him as he ate, with the savoury odour of the *entrées*, the reek of steaming haunch or turkey. And all this time the great work which he was to do hung fire, and nothing existed of his bijou house in Park Lane, but the plans of the architect, and the title deeds of the dirty old building which he was to raze to the ground in order to make room for his ideal dwelling.

One day, after an interview with a particularly awakening clergyman from Haggerston, he told himself that the time had come for carrying out one of his favourite ideas. The season had assumed a sudden severity rarely known in February. The gentleman from Haggerston had harrowed him with his picture of cold and nakedness, fireless grates, and unblanketed beds.

"I will have coals and blankets distributed

from one end of the parish to the other," he exclaimed, snatching up his pen. "I will write to Cockerell and Atkinson this instant."

"It will be well to proceed in a methodic manner," said the parson; "or your benevolence may be preyed upon by impostors. If you will give me *carte-blanche* with the Messrs. Atkinson and Cockerell, and allow me to issue tickets?"

"I will think it over!" replied Redwood, beginning to cool. "Is the district in which you labour populous?"

"Seventy thousand souls."

"And how much fuel and blanketing would make them happy?"

"Oh, they are not all destitute. Say forty thousand. Half a ton of coals, and one pair of blankets to each of those——"

"To each of forty thousand. Twenty thousand tons of coals, and eighty thousand blankets at 20*s.* a pair. £10,000 to Atkinson, and twenty thousand tons of Wallsend at 25*s.* Sir, if I were to indulge my inclination to relieve all these poor people, I should for ever destroy the symmetry of my fortune. I should impinge upon my capital. *That* I cannot do. The shade

of the honoured relative who left me that fortune would pursue me with the frown of displeasure. You must modify your ideas. You must make a selection of the worthiest members of your flock, and these shall be relieved. Let me see you to-morrow."

The vicar went back to Haggerston on the roof of a threepenny omnibus, and Stanhope Redwood breathed more freely.

"I was on the verge of a precipice," he said to himself; "these parsons have no moderation."

He was depressed all that wintry afternoon, and stood at his Tuscan window, watching the falling snowflakes, and the cold and hungry-looking loafers who went shivering by on the edge of the pavement, keeping as much aloof as they could from smug respectability in fur and broadcloth.

"What could any one man do to stem the tide of misery in such a city as this?" he asked himself.

It was futile to think of such a thing. If he were to warm and clothe Haggerston, Lambeth would still be shivering. Bermondsey and Bow would still want blankets, Summer's Town would

be hungry still. It was the old story of the Danaides and their bottomless pails. Nobody could ever fill those pails. He might pour his three millions into them, and the gold would flow through like water, and vanish out of sight for ever. No one else would be much the richer, and he would be beggared.

He spent a miserable afternoon—worried by queer sensations for which he could imagine no cause—curious tinglings that ran down his arm, from shoulder to finger tips, a strange sense of heaviness, a muffled feeling in his head. He had neither occupation nor amusement. He had kept all his old acquaintance, the chosen cronies of his sober bachelorhood, at a distance since he came to the Cyclopean; vaguely cherishing the idea of setting up an entirely new circle of friends in his new house—but this afternoon he would have been glad to welcome droppers in, to see the familiar faces, and hear the old voices.

No one came. That nameless and masked prisoner in the Island of Sainte Marguerite could hardly have felt more lonely. *He* had stately surroundings: silver dishes—a crimson velvet chair in the chapel. That unidentified victim

of state-craft was, perhaps, just as well off as Stanhope Redwood, desolate and deserted in his wealth, with only his bank-book for company.

He dined at his usual hour—long after the rioting had begun below stairs, and the odours of fried fish and savoury gravies had begun to ascend from the *table d'hôte*. He dined in the usual stately silence, attended upon by two waiters, who somewhat hustled him through his meal by their obsequious officiousness. No dawdling was permitted upon his part, no propping up the *Globe* or the *Standard* against the cruet, to snatch the evening news as he ate his leisurely meal.

He had been used to do this in Dusk Street when there was any affair of especial interest on the tapis, and even to read out scraps of news to the faithful Baker, who waited upon him. Here he ate hurriedly, painfully conscious of three pairs of eyes watching every mouthful.

The solemn water scraped the last infinitesimal crumb off the glossy damask—filled Mr. Redwood's glass with Lafitte, handed olives, French plums, and tangerine oranges, which offerings being rejected, he solemnly retired, with his

subordinate. Wolf made his customary formal inquiry as to whether there was any further need for his services, and then he, too, vanished—to his chess-club no doubt—and the triple millionaire was alone.

What loneliness it was in that ecclesiastical dining-room between nine and ten o'clock! The double windows shut out the sounds of the street; the London season had not yet begun, and the residential portions of the hotel, notably the first and second floors—were a howling wilderness. Redwood drew an uneasy armchair to the fire. He had not the courage to go into the adjoining drawing-room. He had a feeling that there might be ghosts on the other side of that tall door, amidst the pallid splendour of white and gold walls and sky-blue satin. He was altogether nervous and shaky, and sat crouching over the fire, thinking himself the wretchedest man in London. He would have given worlds for half-an-hour of Mrs. Baker, with her comfortable red face, and cheery sympathetic talk. He longed even for a mustard poultice, to stimulate the stagnant blood in his veins; yet he was not ill enough to ask for nurse or doctor. He was only

out of sorts, like a child that hangs its head, frets itself, and quarrels with fate, not knowing why.

The thought of the Potentialities weighed upon him as a burden. He had done nothing, he who meant to do so much. The hungry were still unsatisfied, the naked were still shivering, so far as he was concerned.

He thought of his old friends whom he had cut, and of his old life which had been so much pleasanter to him than this transitional period, this dull interregnum between the decent comfort that had been and the exceptional splendour and elegance that were to be, in the house that was yet unbuilt.

He thought of the new circle of friends whom he meant to entertain in that house. They must be the perfect flower of the age, in talents, position, character, altogether supreme. But would such people be prompt to cultivate his acquaintance and ready to eat his dinners? Would cabinet ministers, authors, distinguished ecclesiastics, and royal academicians rally round him? Alas! he had a vague apprehension that the *fine fleur* of the age is for the most part an

over-occupied race, not prone to accept casual invitations; and that the men and women who eat and criticise the dinners of the newly rich are on a lower plane of intellectuality and social value.

"And I am so old," he said to himself piteously. "I have not time enough before me to push to the front rank in society."

No! It would be easier, perhaps, to make his mark as a philanthropist. He remembered Peabody, who seemed to spring into fame and honour in a single day.

"I must do some great thing," he thought; "but what, what? Everything is so expensive, when it comes to doing it on a large scale."

Should he bestow an open space upon some crowded neighbourhood—a park for the toilers in some wretched slum? Should he build a hospital? He had procured estimates of the cost of such works, and the sums required were stupendous. No, he must wait; he must calculate; he must do nothing hurriedly.

And so, with that muffled feeling growing upon him, a strange procession of figures marched confusedly across his weary brain. In his trouble

he wished the pork butcher were still alive, or had left his millions to somebody else. The trouble grew upon him, and with it a feeling of terror mixed with despair. He started up from his chair, tried to reach the ivory knob of the electric bell, failed, and fell like a log in front of the marble curb.

Wolf found him there nearly two hours after, breathing, but unconscious. He was carried to the state bed with the amber satin-damask baldaquin, and he lay there for two nights and a day, dying in the dim wintry dawn of the second day: but he never spoke or thought again, and his three millions, after being disputed by several claimants, and considerably diminished by litigation, finally passed to an heir-at-law who is rapidly reducing the pork butcher's colossal fortune to reasonable dimensions.

"There is a great deal of spending in two millions and a half," says this young gentleman; and as he has a taste for ballooning, the turf, and theatrical management, he has every opportunity of proving the truth of the aphorism.

THE GHOST'S NAME.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT PEOPLE SAID OF THE GHOST.

The most singular feature of the Halverdene ghost was that it never appeared twice in the same shape and fashion. The main fact that a certain room at Halverdene was haunted, and a place of horror, had been borne witness to by so many conscientious people as to be placed beyond the regions of doubt. There were records of the ghost nearly a century old; there were histories as it were of yesterday, all vouched for by witnesses most unlikely to lie; but the ghost, though an old-established fact, verified by nearly a hundred years of varied experiences, was by no means a distinct personality of Shadowland. The ghost was a very Proteus of ghosts; now man now woman; now

old now young; but mostly horrible, and sometimes deriving its chiefest horror from a hideous indistinctness, a gigantic overpowering presence which weighed on the chilled spectator like a mountain of iron; a shapeless oppression to which he awakened shrieking, with icy water-drops upon his forehead.

Lucilla, Lady Halverdene's younger, lovelier sister, called the cedar-room at Halverdene the room of dreadful dreams. She had insisted on sleeping there once in a skittish Christmas mood, when the house-party at Halverdene overflowed every attic; but vowed afterwards that not to be sure of the best match in the county would she go through that ordeal again.

When pressed with questions as to what she had seen, she answered, "Caliban, ten times larger than life. He was there all night. I knew of him in my sleep, though I could not open my eyes to look. My eyelids were sealed with lead, and oh, I had such a headache! He gripped me by the throat, he sat upon my chest. Never, no, never again, Beatrice; not for twenty Halverdenes would I endure a night in that room!"

Everybody in Lucilla Wilmot's generation, a generation now mostly dust—for it was in the days when Lord Melbourne was minister, and railroads were a new thing in the land—everybody at Halverdene, in Beatrice Lady Halverdene's time, regretted that the ghost should have chosen so fine a room as the cedar-room for its head-quarters, since this cedar-panelled bed-chamber was one of the most spacious, if not one of the best rooms in the house. It was in the oldest part of the house, the Stuart wing, which comprised hall and library, a summer parlour, and this large cedar-room which was known as the garden bedroom.

The old wing was on a level with the most delicious old garden in Yorkshire; or so Beatrice Halverdene called it when she came as a bride with the husband of her choice to the old north-country manor. A garden needs perhaps to be two hundred years old in order to be perfectly beautiful. This was a garden planned in Bacon's time, and with many of the quaint features of that time still remaining, but without the sage's more fantastic and tea-gardenish ornamentation, the mere suggestion

of which in the famous essay might convince any reasonable person that if Bacon wrote Shakespeare's plays, Shakespeare did not write Bacon's essays: for he whose lightest line can conjure visions of Arcadian beauty would never have recommended stately arches upon pillars of carpenter's work, crowned with little turrets containing bird-cages, or "broad plates of round coloured glass, gilt, for the sun to play upon," in his scheme of an English garden.

Beatrice in those early days of happy wedded love called that fair enclosure her garden of Eden; but seven years of childless wedlock had sobered her enthusiasm, and the union between my lord and my lady seemed hardly that of the Miltonic Adam and Eve. There were those in the neighbourhood who said that my lord cared more for the health of his hounds than for the happiness of his wife; and that an outbreak of distemper in the kennel would have distressed him more than a threat of phthisis in the partner of his life.

There are men with whom love is only a transient fever; lovers to whom it comes natural to love and ride away, and who, when riding

away is impossible, are apt to become churlish companions by the domestic hearth.

Those were days in which it was counted no disgrace to a man of high station to be a hard drinker. The memory of the Prince Regent, of Fox, of Sheridan, was still fresh in the minds of men. Brougham and other great intellectual lights were carrying on the old tradition. Port, Burgundy, Madeira, and other heady vintages were much more popular than Bordeaux and light wines from the Rhineland. Port was a part of an Englishman's patriotism, almost of his religion. It was a sound orthodox wine which churchmen loved. Rural benevolence found its best expression in port. Your Lady Bountiful no longer brewed unsavoury decoctions of healing herbs and called that charity. She sent strong soup and strong wine to the weak and ailing, and every villager in England smacked his lips at the name of the rich red vintage of Portugal.

Thus, it was counted no shame to Lord Halverdene that after a day in the saddle he recruited himself with a night over the mahogany and a couple of bottles of his famous

wine. It was counted no shame if his valet had to help him up the slippery oak staircase now and again, and was occasionally sworn at for his pains. My lord was excused even for occasional rough language to my lady; for, as the village gossips said, "it was a sad pity she had no children, and it was only human natur' that his lordship should feel disappointed at the non-appearance of an heir."

Horses, hounds, and wine were my lord's idea of happiness. My lady loved her garden, her books, and her harp, and contrived to preserve an outward semblance of contentment under circumstances which might have driven a woman of lesser nature to open revolt against hard fate.

My lord had a house in Grosvenor Square and a park in Sussex, besides this manor and park of Halverdene, between York and Beverley. He was fondest of Halverdene, because of its accessibility from York, Doncaster, and Pontefract, where the frequent race-meetings afforded him the amusement his soul loved best. He had a small racing stud at Halverdene, but his best horses were kept at Malton, under the

invincible eye of John Scott. The chief ambition of his mind was to win the Leger, or for second best, the Great Ebor.

After three seasons in London, Lady Halverdene withdrew altogether from Metropolitan society, and was to be heard of only in Yorkshire or in Sussex, generally in Yorkshire, where for the first four years of her married life there were large house-parties, and where Lucilla Wilmot found life very enjoyable, attending all the county race-meetings with her sister, and riding to hounds. But for the last two years there had been very few visitors of my lady's choosing at Halverdene. Lucilla was always there, her sister's only companion in the long autumn evenings when his lordship was away at race-meetings; but, of the fashionable world, the dowagers and wives, the young men and maidens, who had once filled all the rooms and corridors with voices and laughter, there was nothing left but the memory of those days when Halverdene House had been hospitable and gay. Visitors there were, it is true, racing men brought home by his lordship without word of warning to wife or housekeeper. Sometimes,

after one of the northern meetings, three or four post-chaises would drive up to the door, late at night, and a bevy of half-intoxicated men would come reeling in. Some of these were underbred men whose talk was half made up of turf slang, and from whose society Lady Halverdene and her sister shrank as from a pestilence.

People shrugged their shoulders when they talked of Lord Halverdene.

"There is a mystery of some kind," said old General Palmer, to a little knot of men at the Rag.

"The mystery is that Halverdene beats his wife," answered Mr. Soaper-Snarle, the famous wit and reviewer. "We don't call that kind of thing a mystery in St. Giles'. There it's only wife-beating; but when an English nobleman turns brute and bully we call it a social mystery."

"Is that true?" cried an eager voice, strong and stern of accent. "Is it true that Lord Halverdene ill-treats his wife?"

The inquiry came from a tall broad-shouldered young man, with a sunburnt face and a cavalry moustache, a man just returned from the Punjab, and to whom most English scandals were new.

"I can only answer for what I saw myself when I was at Halverdene two years ago," answered Snarle, blandly. "Halverdene was uncommonly disagreeable to his wife then, and she looked as if she was used to it. There was nothing of the snivelling Griselda about her, mind you, but her resistance was quiet and dumb. She met his brutality with an icy scorn; but the house was no longer a comfortable house to stay in. One felt oneself on the crust of a volcano. Since then there have been very few high jinks at Halverdene. I saw her ladyship and her sister at York races last August, and they were both very nice to me, as they always were; only there was no talk of my going to Halverdene, although I was in their neighbourhood."

"I have heard things," said General Palmer; "but one never knows how much to believe. It was a love-match, wasn't it? I was told so when they were married."

"Yes, it was a love-match. Miss Wilmot was one of the beauties of her year—a belle in her first season—a ward in chancery, with a fortune that came very handy to Halverdene."

The sunburnt soldier from Cabul had left the group and was looking out of the window. His half-smoked cheroot lay forgotten where it had dropped from his hand, and his thoughts were in a Devonshire orchard, where he was a boy again, fresh from a military school, playing battledore and shuttlecock with two fair-haired girls in white frocks—girls whom, by some right of cousinship, he called by their Christian names. The Wilmots and the Donellys were very distant cousins, but still it was a cousinship, and Oscar Donelly had many privileges in the house of the jovial maiden aunt by whom these orphans were reared. He was a favourite with the elder lady, and the girls were frankly cordial to him. He brought them news of the great world, of which they knew absolutely nothing. Even Beatrice, the elder, would have to wait three or four years before she was to be presented and spend her first season in London, under the wing of a married aunt who had a house in Curzon Street, and was said to know only the best people.

The young cornet sailed for India with his regiment at the beginning of the Afghan war

The campaign had been a long and bitter one, and the subaltern came back to England a captain, but not altogether assured that the hero of Candahar was more to be envied than the cadet who played battledore and shuttlecock in the orchard between Starcross and Exeter. Home letters had told him of the Wilmots' appearance in society—the sisters had been presented at the same drawing-room, and made their *début* in the great world side by side. There was only a year between them, and Beatrice had begged that they should go through the ordeal together, and had prevailed against her aunt's opinion.

"You will not be thought half so much of," she said, "if there are two of you."

The event proved her mistaken. The fact that there were two girls equally handsome and equally dowered, both bright and spirited and in the first freshness of youthful bloom, impressed people. The two Miss Wilmots were admired and run after wherever they went. No smart party was complete without them. When the two Miss Wilmots took influenza and were laid up together, Mayfair was in mourning.

Each had numerous offers between April and August. Both were difficult, but Lucilla was impossible. She refused some splendid opportunities of doing well for herself and improving the status of her family. Her aunt, Mrs. Montressor, who had married three portionless daughters with business-like celerity, was irate at this capriciousness.

"Do you expect to marry the Pope?" she asked.

"I believe a triple crown would tempt me; but then he would be old; they always are," said Lucilla, who had not been so severely educated as to trouble herself about the arrangement of nominatives in familiar conversation.

Every one was surprised when Lord Halverdene was announced to the world as Beatrice's successful suitor. His reputation was by no means spotless; his passion for the turf was notorious; but he was handsome, and had that grand open manner and rather haughty bearing which a very young woman is apt to admire; especially when she has seen very little of the world, or of the dark abysses that may lie under that fine candid manner.

No doubt in the beginning of things Halverdene was deeply in love, and a sincere passion gave fire and force to his pursuit of the heiress.

They were married, and for the first year of her wedded life Beatrice was completely happy. Then came the shadow of trouble, and then the cold wind of a husband's indifference blew with deadly breath across the home paradise. Slowly and gradually the wife grew to understand the character of the man she loved. She heard stories of his past; she knew of damning facts in the present. Hymen reversed his taper, and the sacred flame went out for ever.

Beatrice was what is called a woman of spirit. She had made her choice matrimonial, and had stuck to it in the teeth of opposition, disregarding her London aunt's hints and insinuations, her country aunt's prejudices and cautions. Having taken her own course, she was too proud to complain of her disappointment even to her nearest and dearest. The world only knew of her troubles through the gossip of servants and rustic neighbours, and from the cessation of all pleasant hospitalities.

Lucilla, who insisted upon living with her

sister, to the hindrance of all matrimonial opportunities for herself, alone knew what that sister had to suffer, and even to her Beatrice never opened her heart.

The affection between the sisters was of the strongest, or Lucilla would hardly have endured life in a house where she was subject to the rough insolence of a host for whom her presence was often an incubus; but Lucilla was not the kind of young woman to be scared by any man's rudeness, and she laughed his lordship's attacks to scorn.

"You don't suppose I stay at Halverdene to please you," she said, "or that I care whether you are glad or sorry to have me here?"

Beatrice had urged her sister to find a happier home, even if she did not care to accept any of those offers which would have ensured her a kind husband and a good social position. Any home would have been more congenial to a handsome young woman than Halverdene, where the dulness was only broken by an occasional irruption of noisy racing men. Lucilla was adamant.

"I don't mean to marry till I fall honestly in love," she told her sister; "and I don't want to

set up a house of my own and establish myself in permanent spinsterhood. As for his lordship, *je m'en fiche.* It amuses me to quarrel with him. I am perfectly happy here. We have the horses and dogs, old servants who are fond of us, and a garden which we both adore. What more can we want for happiness? If you plague me about leaving you I shall order my goods to be taken to the garden bedroom, and establish myself there; and then perhaps I shall see the ghost, and die, as those poor children did."

This was an allusion to the earliest well-authenticated tradition of the ghost-chamber.

In the days when the garden bedroom had been a night nursery, two children of the first Lord Halverdene, a boy and a girl of nine and seven years old, had been frightened by some ghastly appearance in that fine old room, and had told their nurses vague stories of the something that brooded over their beds. The visions had occurred at longish intervals, and their vagueness had suggested childish dreams; but the death of the two children, which had happened within a year, had given a new aspect to the story in the minds of the superstitious and

ignorant. The formless visions childishly depicted were placed on record as ghostly warnings foreshadowing doom, and the reputation of the garden bedroom as a ghost-chamber was firmly established. A century and a half of occasional appearances had maintained the traditions of the house, and to hint a doubt of the ghost in the village of Halverdene, or even in the Vicarage drawing-room, was to be assured with gravest head-shakings that this particular case was established by indisputable evidence. Other ghost-stories might be foolishness; but the ghost at Halverdene House was fact.

"And nobody can tell me the nature and appearance of the thing," cried Lucilla, taking tea in the bosom of the Vicar's family, which was not too grand to dine at three o'clock in summer and take tea at six, for the sake of an evening walk after tea. "That is what worries me about this particular ghost. Nobody seems to know anything about him. When I slept in the room myself——"

The two younger daughters—both in the pinafore period of their existence—crowded upon her at this point, and nearly squeezed her off her

chair, interrupting her with breathless interrogation.

"Did you—did you really sleep there, Miss Wilmot? How awful!"

"How lovely!"

"And did you see anything? Oh, did you see *it?*"

"No, Dolly, I didn't see it; but I knew it was there."

"Oh, tell us, tell us, do tell us!" with growing breathlessness. "How sweet of you, how brave of you to sleep there! Let me take your cup. Do tell us."

"There is very little to tell. It was Christmas-time, and we had a big house-party. I had been dancing all the evening, and I was dead beat. I slept like a top for two or three hours; and then I woke suddenly in the pitch darkness, and I felt that there was something—something holding me by the throat and strangling me—something huge and horrible, with red-hot claws that pressed into my chest. I don't know if I fainted, or fell into a dead sleep, or what happened to me; but when the housemaid brought me my tea in the morning, I woke with a splitting

headache, and I felt ill, and shivering, and wretched for two or three days after; and then Beatrice insisted on carrying me off to Bridlington to get the ghostly feeling blown out of me by the North Sea."

"And you don't even know what the ghost was like?" said Dolly, disappointed.

"How could I? The room was pitch dark."

"How tiresome! There is generally some kind of light," pursued Dolly, falling back on her knowledge of the stories of Ghostland she had read in gorgeous half-guinea annuals, among the portraits of beautiful peeresses. "The moon suddenly shines in through an opening in the damask curtains; or the wood fire, which has burnt low, flames up with a last flash, and one sees the ghost's face, and dress, and jewellery."

"Ah, Dolly, that is the ghost of fiction; a lady in a sacque; a gentleman in a Ramillies wig. The thing that haunts Halverdene is a reality, and the fact that nobody has ever been able to describe the thing goes to prove that it is real."

Dolly and her sister listened open-mouthed

as Lucilla soared into that region of the abstract where their young minds could not follow her.

"The thing that haunts the room may be an unresting conscience burdened with a crime unatoned, or a wicked soul that died and made no sign, and even in the grave is tortured with its lust of sin, hate, jealousy, wicked love—who knows? Oh, my dears, forgive me! I am raving. Don't let me talk of that horrid room any more. When I remember what I suffered there I always get a little mad."

"It had red-hot claws," said Dolly, dwelling on the one descriptive touch which appealed to her juvenile ideality.

"Dolly, if you insist upon talking about it, I vow I'll make you sleep in the room," cried Lucilla, shaking herself free from the two pinafores.

"I should like to sleep there," said Dolly, opening her eyes very wide.

"Yes, and die like those other children who slept in the garden bedroom when it was a nursery. That room has always been fatal to children. It was not the first Lord Halverdene's

children only—there were others who died ninety years afterwards, three children in one family—a younger son's family—three children in one summer."

"Had they seen the ghost—all of them?" asked Dolly, awe-stricken; while Cecily, the younger pinafore, could only shape the words dumbly with dry lips.

"I don't know; they had been frightened in the room. The old woman at the lodge told me about them. They were nervous, sensitive children—not great bouncing creatures like you and Cis—and they died in one summer. That's all the old woman could tell me about them, and she was nursemaid at Halverdene fifty years ago. But it's very wrong of me to talk to you of such horrors."

"We like it," said Dolly; "we dote upon ghosts."

"Silly, morbid little things! Why, all sensible people know that ghosts are nonsense. Come and show me your gardens."

"She has a lettuce in hers," said Cicely, pointing to the elder pinafore. "It isn't very big yet, but we water it every evening."

"You'll drown it," Lucilla told them. "It will turn into a watercress."

They took hold of her, one hanging on to each hand, and dragged her out through the French window, and across the lawn to that obscure portion of the vicarage grounds where the children had their allotments. They were two funny little figures in long white pinafores, and plaited pig-tails tied with brown ribbon, and they really were children, which was not so wonderful a fact in the early part of the forties as it might seem now.

CHAPTER II.

HOW CAPTAIN DONELLY HEARD OF THE GHOST.

Captain Donelly could not banish the thought of the Devonshire orchard and the girls whose bright faces had made the homely scene paradisaic. He was deeply moved at the notion of Beatrice's domestic troubles. That she should be ill-used by a husband, she whose love should have made the meanest of men great and noble, she whom he would have loved kneeling, as devout Romanists love the saints. She was only seventeen in those innocent boyish days, before ever his battle of life began, as fresh and as confiding as a child. He would have deemed it sacrilege to tell her of his love—selfish to ask her to wait for him. What of this world's gear could he ever have worthy to lay at her feet?

They had been boy and girl together, she seventeen, he under twenty, and his love had

been but a boy's love. A lad just beginning life in a profession which he thinks the finest in the world, with his future all before him, and the novel delights of uniform, mess, and parade ground, is apt to think just a little more of himself and his own ambitious hopes than of the girl he loves. It was afterwards at a lonely hill-station, where the long evenings hung heavy on his hands, that Oscar Donelly began to discover how fondly he had loved that third or fourth cousin of his. It was afterwards when a letter from his father's Irish vicarage brought him the news of Beatrice's marriage, that he knew how deep he had been in love with her, by the sharpness of his agony at knowing that she was lost to him. His happy-go-lucky Irish temper had made him ignore the probability of her marrying in her first season. He told himself that she would be difficult to please; he flattered himself that he had a corner in her heart which might help to keep out a stranger, and that after a few years of hard fighting he might go home to find her still free, and willing to be won. He knew how daring had been his hopes now that all hope was over.

He had only been in London a few days when he heard his old friend General Palmer and Mr. Soaper-Snarle talking about Lady Halverdene. His first duty was to his father and sisters in the south of Ireland, where he spent the second half of July and the beginning of August. That visit finished he set his face towards Yorkshire, a long cross-country journey from Holyhead; but he contrived to arrive at York in time for the summer meeting. He had been told that Lord and Lady Halverdene were sure to be at the races.

It was brilliant weather, and the old city was full of gaiety, and overflowing with visitors. Beds, even in the shabbiest lodging-houses, over shabby shops, were at a premium. Happily Oscar had friends at the barracks who were able and willing to put him up for the three nights, and on their drag he went to the Knavesmire.

He did not stop with the party on the drag, but left them in order to look for his friends on the grand stand, after a careful review of the carriages had convinced him that the Halverdenes were not among that giddy and unbusiness-like part of the community to whom a race only

means picnicking among a smartly dressed crowd, with all the troublesome accompaniments of gipsies, acrobats, itinerant musicians, and beggars of every description. The nigger minstrel —otherwise Ethiopian Serenader—had not been invented at that period of English history.

The comparative quiet of the grand stand, though it was pretty well filled, was positively soothing after the noise and racket of the course, and Captain Donelly had no trouble in finding the people he wanted. They were in the front seat at one end of the stand, two tall women dressed almost alike in lavender muslin gowns, straw bonnets, and black silk scarves, a style of dress which would seem very dowdy to the modern idea, but which was then graceful and elegant. The reader may refer to "Nicholas Nickleby," or to the illustrations of Balzac's novels, where he will see a simplicity of drapery which is not unbecoming to a graceful figure.

Captain Donelly thought he had never seen a lovelier face than the one which smiled at him in the shadow of a cottage bonnet.

"Beatrice!" he exclaimed, holding out his hands, and seizing both of hers.

"No, Lucilla. Beatrice is so absorbed in the horses that she has not even seen you. How sunburnt you are! When did you come home?"

"Four weeks ago. I need not ask if you are well. Those blooming cheeks answer for themselves."

"If I were a milkmaid I should curtsy my thanks for your compliment, but blooming cheeks are about the last thing a young woman of *ton* would choose to be accredited with. Pallor and fragility are the essentials of a fashionable belle."

"I have had a surfeit of pallid beauty in India, and I am charmed to see health and good looks at home. How is Lady Halverdene?"

"You must ask that question for yourself. Beatrice, here is Captain Donelly waiting to be welcomed as a hero after his perils in the Punjab."

Beatrice rose and came towards them. She was changed from the happy girl he had known in Devonshire. Trouble had set its mark upon her. In the old days Lucilla had been an in-

significant chit of sixteen, with hardly the promise of beauty, while Beatrice was radiant in budding loveliness; a rosebud just expanding into a rose. Now Lucilla was the rose, and Beatrice had a faded look, but withal so noble a carriage of head and throat, and so exquisite a smile, that she was to Oscar's eyes even more interesting than in the bloom of her girlhood.

She blushed as she welcomed him, and then sighed. The blush was for an innocent love-story that had long been ended and all but forgotten. The sigh came with the thought of all she had suffered since they two had parted. Then the woman of society asserted herself.

"Have you seen Halverdene? No! He is in the ring, or in the paddock, I dare say. He has two horses in the next race, both doomed to lose, I fear. Are you not glad to be back in England after that terrible war? What horrors, what suffering! My heart bled—every English heart bled—as I read of that awful tragedy."

They sat down side by side and talked gravely, frankly, as if they had been brother and sister—talked of himself and of his experiences; but of herself and of what she had done and suffered

in the long interval of severance there was very little said.

"You have a place near here, I think?" he said, by-and-by, when the race was over.

One of Lord Halverdene's horses had come in a bad third, the other was nowhere. Beatrice looked distressed at the failure, though it had seemed inevitable before the race began.

"Nineteen miles. I don't know if you call that near."

"Do you go back to-night?"

"No. Lucilla and I are stopping at the hotel with Halverdene. We shall go back to-morrow evening; but I dare say Halverdene will stay for the last of the racing, and come home on the coach on Saturday."

Halverdene came up to the stand presently, very angry at the failure of his horses, but flushed with wine, and with a kind of savage mirth which showed itself in his effusive recognition of his wife's kinsman.

"You'll dine with us at the Royal, of course, Captain Donelly, seven sharp, and as good a brand of Moet as you need wish to drink."

The captain explained that he was staying at

the barracks, and could hardly excuse himself from the mess dinner.

"D—n the mess! I know all those fellows, and they know me. Bring as many of them as you like. We'll make a night of it."

"I'd rather come in for an hour after dinner, if you'll allow me."

"Do as you like, my dear fellow," cried his lordship; and then swaggered away and was speedily absorbed into a group of rather disreputable-looking men, and laughing and talking louder than the loudest of them.

His presence had silenced his wife, and Oscar could see that every tone of that loud voice, every peal of reckless laughter, was pain to her. She sat looking across the Knavesmire with eyes that took no delight in the varied crowd, the play of summer light upon the landscape and the people, the movement and the gladness of the scene.

Captain Donelly dined with his friends at the mess, and adjourned to the Royal Hotel at nine o'clock. He found Lady Halverdene and her sister in a dimly lighted drawing-room,

while from the adjoining dining-room came the sound of several voices and frequent bursts of laughter.

"Halverdene asked some of his racing friends to dinner," Beatrice told him; "so Lucilla and I dined *tête-à-tête*, and have been moping here in the dark ever since. I think there is hardly anything so disheartening as an inn sitting-room for birds of passage, as we are. No belongings, books, work, anything. We have been looking at the engraving of the Queen's marriage as if we had never seen that work of art before."

"I should have asked the waiter to bring us a pack of cards if I had not been afraid he would laugh at me. We might have played Beggar my Neighbour or Casino," said Lucilla.

"Will you join Halverdene and his friends in the dining-room?" asked Beatrice.

"What, desert you when you own to being moped! No, Lady Halverdene, I mean to be as amusing—or at least as flippant as a walking gentleman in a five-act comedy. How I wish I were witty for your sakes! Or, a happier idea; you two who have lived in the world,

while I have been living out of it, can amuse me with a few of the scandals that have been town-talk while I have been in the Indian hills."

A waiter brought in an urn and a tea-tray, and Lucilla made tea, and the talk soon drifted out of an artificial channel to the days that were gone, when these three had been happy without fear or even thought of the future. Oscar and Lucilla were the chief talkers, Lady Halverdene sitting in the shadowy region beyond the light of those candles which made so formidable an item in an old-fashioned hotel bill, and yet left a room so dark. Once there came a faint sigh from among the shadows, but there was for the most part silence.

Presently the doors burst open and Lord Halverdene and his boon-companions poured into the room, most of them like the sons of Belial, "flown with insolence and wine." The talk became noisy almost to riotousness. Halverdene had obviously been drinking, and if his guests seemed less affected by liquor, it was only because they were hardened by longer habit, and that while he had been gradually de-

generating into a drunkard, intemperance was with them a second nature.

To-night he was good-natured in his cups, and he treated Donelly with boisterous friendliness.

"You must come to Halverdene," he said; "you can go post with me to-morrow. We'll manage to put you up: the old house will bear a good bit of squeezing, though my lady and her sister contrive to absorb a whole wing. Your fine lady is a bird that must have a very roomy cage, nowadays. Let me see," advancing an uncertain finger and pointing first at one of his companions and then at another; "there's you, and you, and the major, and Parson Bob," here the wavering finger indicated a seedy man in a clerical neckcloth, "and the rest of you," half a dozen in all, but to Halverdene's blinded vision they may have seemed half a score; "but we can find a shake-down for her ladyship's cousin; yes, old file, even if we have to put you in the haunted room."

He stood in front of the empty fireplace, with his coat-tails under his arms, swaying backwards and forwards, laughing long and loud at what

he thought a capital joke. No one noisier than my lord when he took his wine good naturedly.

This was the first that Oscar Donelly had heard of the haunted room.

"What, have you a ghost at Halverdene?" he exclaimed lightly.

"Dozens of 'em. Not that I ever saw anything; but the ghosts have been there time out of mind, and the room they haunt is a plaguey unlucky room. It may be only a coincidence," said Halverdene, sinking from loud joviality to a solemn whisper; "but any young people who have slept in that room have come to an untimely end. It used to be a nursery! a nice nursery, by Jove! The children saw something, took it to heart, and died. If Providence—gave me an heir—wou'dn lerr him sleep in that nur-er-y," concluded Halverdene, becoming suddenly unintelligible.

Captain Donelly thanked him in general terms for his invitation, and declared his intention of profiting by it, not immediately, but at some future time.

"When your house may not be quite so full," he said; "though I am not afraid of a night or

two in your haunted room. I always carry a pistol-case; and I think your ghost would come off second best."

"Ah, that's a dangerous dodge, popping at ghosts," said the seedy parson; "generally turns out badly. You may shoot the footman who brings you your shaving-water, or a sportsman who has got up at three o'clock for cub-hunting, and happens to look into the wrong room. No use shooting at a ghost! If he is a ghost you can't hurt him, and if he isn't it may mean manslaughter."

Captain Donelly did not court conversation with the cleric whom his friends addressed as Parson Bob. The old clock on the stairs struck eleven, and Oscar bade his cousins good night, and slipped out of the room while Halverdene's back was turned. His lordship was standing at a card-table with his friends clustered round him, betting on the cut, in that highly intellectual game known as Blind Hookey. The captain's heart ached for the lady whom he remembered so lovely and light-hearted, with life and its chances of happiness all before her.

Yes, he meant to avail himself of Lord Halverdene's invitation. He wanted to see what manner of life his cousin led in her own home, with such a husband as the man he had seen to-night. He had not asked for Beatrice's approval of her husband's invitation, for he divined that she would shrink from admitting even a kinsman to the secrets of her domestic life. His blood burned within him at the thought that such men as those battered *roués*, those second-rate racing men he had seen to-night, were free to enter the house where a refined and beautiful woman was mistress.

Captain Donelly travelled further north, spent a fortnight at a friend's shooting lodge in Argyleshire, shot a good many head of game, tramped over a good many miles of heather, ate a good many bannocks, drank his share of the famous Lochiel whisky, and bored himself stupendously. His heart was not in the business, and his friends found it out.

"You are a deuced good shot," said one of them, "but a d——d dull companion;" and Donelly owned that he was out of spirits and

unhappy about some one whom he—whom he cared for.

He could not get Beatrice Halverdene's face out of his mind, with its wan smile and frequent look of pain. He could not forget Halverdene's brutal manner, the drunken laughter, the thickened utterance, and, worst of all, the raffish dissipated companions, the reprobates who were allowed to sit at meat and drink with this drunken sinner's wife.

To think that she had married this man for love, and that the first year of her wedded life had been an idyll! His home letters had told him, in a young sister's enthusiastic language, of Lady Halverdene's happy marriage, adoring, and adored by her husband. It was not his coronet that had won her. She had married for love.

That yearning to see more of the woman he had loved in his boyhood grew upon Oscar Donelly in the lonely Scottish hills. His companions of the shooting lodge were sportsmen and nothing more. Their everlasting talk of sport wearied him. He was among them, but not of them; and one morning he pretended

that his letters brought him an urgent summons southward, on family business, and a post-chaise took him to Glasgow the following afternoon in time for the coach which left that city at eight in the evening.

It was evening again when he left York in another post-chaise on his way to Halverdene, and it was past ten o'clock when he alighted from the chaise in front of the Queen Anne doorway, with its stone shell-shaped pediment, and tall narrow window on either side; windows within which the light showed dimly, as if the hall of the mansion were but sparely lighted.

"I hope every one has not gone to bed," thought Oscar.

He felt that this night attack was rather a desperate style of acting upon a general invitation; but Lord Halverdene was not a man with whom he need be over-ceremonious, and the captain wanted to take his lordship's household by surprise, in order to arrive at the better knowledge of his cousin's domestic life. And yet, alas! what good could come of that knowledge to the lady or to himself? If her husband were unkind, what could he do to help her? If

her life were unhappy, what could he do to make it happier?

A sleepy-looking servant opened the door and admitted him into a large and lofty hall, paved with black and white marble, and adorned with the most conventional and uninteresting of family portraits. The weather had been wet and gusty from early morning, when Captain Donelly left Newcastle outside the mail coach, preferring to be wet in the open air than to be dry in a stuffy vehicle with its full complement of passengers. He was chilled to the bone, and he looked almost resentfully at the wide fireplace with its sculptured marble chimney-piece surmounted by a bust of Minerva, forgetting that it was only the first week in September, and that people were still pretending to think it summer.

"Be good enough to bring in my portmanteau, and pay the postilion for me," said Oscar, counting some money into the sleepy footman's palm.

"Yes, I'll see to that," the footman answered in rather an off-hand tone. "You're the person that was sent for, I suppose?"

"The person that was sent for! What do you mean? I am Captain Donelly; her ladyship's cousin."

"I beg your pardon, sir," stammered the man, much humbled; "there was a person expected—from York—and I thought, seeing the portmanteau—and—I beg your pardon, sir."

"His lordship is at home, I conclude?"

"Yes, sir, but he is not very well, and he went to bed two hours ago. Her ladyship and Miss Wilmot are in the morning-room. If you'll step this way, sir, I'll look to your portmanteau afterwards."

He led the way to a room at the other end of a long narrow corridor, which looked of older date than the entrance hall, flung open the door with the true London air, and announced—

"Captain Donelly."

The sisters were seated far apart, Lucilla at the piano, but not playing, Lady Halverdene half hidden in a large armchair by the fireplace, where there was a cheery little fire, which revived Oscar's sinking spirits almost as much as the sight of his cousins.

"Oscar!" they cried simultaneously, and in

neither face was there any pleasure mingled with the look of surprise.

It was not a cheering welcome. Captain Donelly could hardly misread the face of his cousin Beatrice, which expressed something akin to fear.

"You didn't expect me," he said, "but I hope you are not vexed with me for taking his lordship at his word so completely, and bursting in upon you without notice. You remember he said I might come at any time, there would always be room for me, even if it were only the ghost's room," he concluded, trying to be jocose.

"Yes, I remember," answered Beatrice, looking from her visitor to her sister with such obvious embarrassment that Oscar felt he ought not to remain, even although she was his kinswoman, and he had travelled a night and a day for the sole purpose of finding out what her home life was like.

"I see that my unexpected arrival embarrasses you," he said. "I have been very inconsiderate. A man's invitation counts for nothing when there is a lady in the case. I ought to have waited for you to ask me here. And I am so atrociously

late, too. I thought I should have been here by eight o'clock at the latest, but the Newcastle Lightning is about the slowest coach I ever travelled by. If there is an inn within a walk I'll go there for to-night. I can come back to breakfast with you to-morrow morning; and then you can decide at your leisure whether you would like to have me for a few days or not. If Halverdene is ill you may prefer to be without visitors."

"Nonsense!" cried Lucilla. "Of course you must stay; even if we do put you in the ghost-room," she added, as if answering a look of her sister's. "Would you mind? It is really one of the best rooms in the house—and as the ghost is so very shifty and intangible nobody need be afraid of him, need they?"

"I would not be afraid if he were the most palpable and clearly defined apparition in England," said Donelly, trying to infuse some cheerfulness into the situation.

Lucilla rang and ordered the cedar-room to be got ready for Captain Donelly.

"Be sure there is a good fire, and that everything is thoroughly aired," she said peremptorily;

"and see that Captain Donelly's portmanteau is unpacked for him. And you must have supper," she said to Oscar, taking the matter into her own hands, while Lady Halverdene sat inert, and apparently uninterested, looking at the fire. "I dare say you dined early, and perhaps badly into the bargain."

"Both," admitted Oscar; and Lucilla gave her orders for a snug little supper to be served in the room where they were sitting.

Her cousin could but admire her grace and brightness, her prompt decided way of settling things. All of energy and vivacity that Beatrice had once possessed—and he recalled the light-hearted shuttle-cock player in the Devonshire orchard—seemed to have left her. To-night she was dull and silent, and it wounded him to think that she was bored and annoyed by his univited presence.

"Come and sit by the fire," said Lucilla. "Beatrice is out of spirits because of his lordship's illness. You mustn't mind her."

"But I do mind. I feel very sorry to have intruded at such a time. Is Lord Halverdene really very ill?"

"Yes, he is very bad."

"What is it?"

"The doctors hardly give it a name. You know how mysterious doctors are. It is some kind of nervous complaint. They say it has been coming on for a long while, and that is about all they say. We have sent to York for a skilled attendant; and in the mean time Halverdene's valet is a very good nurse. There is no use in Beatrice moping. She can do nothing."

"That is the saddest part of it all," said Lady Halverdene, and then relapsed into silence.

"What a delightful room!" said Oscar, looking about, and admiring the panelled walls and low ceiling with its carved oak cross-beams.

"Yes, it is one of the old rooms. This wing was built in Charles II.'s time, when the place was only a hunting-lodge; the Queen Anne front and wings were added fifty years later, so that the principal part of the mansion is only an afterthought! Your quarters are close by. I am very fond of this room, and Beatrice and his lordship are kind enough to let me call it my own, as it is in the unpopular end of the house, and nobody cares about it."

"I hope the ghost doesn't intrude here."

"Oh no; he, she, or it is a conscientious ghost, and never breaks bounds."

And then Lucilla told him how she had spent one night in the haunted room for her own pleasure, and he questioned her as to what she had seen there.

"I don't believe I saw anything—really," she said. "Looking back at my experience in the sober light of common sense, I think the thing which scared me was only a bad dream—a very horrid dream—of the nightmare nature; the sense of some huge indescribable presence squatting on my chest, weighing me down into a bottomless pit of horror and suffocation. I went there prepared to be frightened, and the hideousness—the horrid feeling of the visitation—was quite equal to my darkest imaginings; but after all I believe it was only a dream, and that my own imagination was to blame for all I suffered."

Oscar moved about the room looking at the books and china, the pictures, which were few but good, and lastly at a row of miniatures mounted upon faded red velvet, which hung upon a panel near the fireplace.

"These are interesting," he said. "Family portraits, I conclude?"

"Yes, those two at the top are the boy and girl who used to sleep in the cedar nursery, and who both died. I believe that was what first gave the room its evil repute. And after, when another occupant of the room died young, people talked of it as an unlucky room, and it began to be considered fatal."

"It was not fatal to you, I am glad to think."

"No, and it is not going to be fatal to you, unless those servants are careless in the matter of airing things. Perhaps you would like to see the room before you sup?"

"Very much. I should like to make what our neighbours call *un brin de toilette* before I sit down to eat with my esteemed cousins."

"Then let it be only *un brin*," said Lucilla; "don't put yourself into dress clothes at this hour of the night, just because Beatrice and I are in evening gowns."

"I will do nothing that will deprive me of your society for more than ten minutes," said Oscar, gallantly; "but I am dying to see the ghost-room."

"You shall not be allowed to expire," Lucilla said gaily, as she rang the bell.

Her life and brightness charmed him. He began to wonder whether he had ever been in love with Beatrice—poor Beatrice, sitting by the fire, dull and despondent, weighed down by anxiety about a sick husband who was reported to have neglected and ill-used her when he was well. Oscar pitied the down-trodden wife with all his heart; but he found it very difficult to associate her with the sparkling young beauty of the Devonian village. The sparkling beauty was here, but her name was no longer Beatrice. She was Lucilla, whose brilliant eyes, sunny curls, and white shoulders shone out in the sombre old panelled parlour, a revelation of unexpected beauty; Lucilla, of whom his earlier memories could only recall pigtails and a pinafore.

He was conducted to a room close by—*the* room, a spacious wainscoted chamber with three windows, one opening to the ground, a noble fire burning in a wide iron grate with old-fashioned hobs and an elaborately floriated back. The bedstead was a fine mahogany

fourposter, with slim-fluted columns and handsome green silk curtains, nothing hearse-like or gloomy about it. Altogether, the room in the light of that glorious coal and wood fire, and with a pair of candles alight on the dressing-table, had a cheerful and comfortable aspect. The footman had unpacked the portmanteau, had laid out brushes, and combs, and razors on the dressing-table, and placed all things ready for the guest. Oscar made a rapid toilet, and returned to the sitting-room, splendid in a dark brown coat, and a black velvet waistcoat worked with gold thread, and one of those all-conquering black satin stocks which are familiar to us in the early portraits of Dickens and D'Orsay. He felt that although he had been forbidden to put on evening dress he was not looking his worst.

A light impromptu supper was laid on a pembroke table near the fire, and the trio sat down together in the friendliest way. Lucilla carved a chicken with skill and *aplomb*—those were the days in which a lady was expected to be able to carve—while Oscar operated upon a ham. The footman opened a champagne

bottle and filled the three tall narrow glasses. No butler had appeared on the scene, and Oscar concluded that functionary had gone to bed before his arrival.

Lucilla persuaded her sister to eat a little chicken and drink a little wine.

"You had positively nothing at dinner," she said: "you are killing yourself," at which Lady Halverdene looked at her reproachfully, and then with an evident effort put on an appearance of cheerfulness, and finally, beguiled into self-forgetfulness, joined in the light talk of the other two, and seemed almost happy.

They sat talking till the fire went out, and a loud clock in the distance struck twelve.

"Every stroke sounds a reproach," said Lucilla. "Upon my word, Oscar, you have tempted us into most unholy dissipation. Do you know that we usually light our chamber candlesticks and stalk solemnly up to bed at half-past ten?"

"I am ashamed of having made you so late."

"You have done us a kindness," said Lady Halverdene. "The nights are always too long when one is anxious."

"You ought not to be so anxious," Oscar said cheerfully; "with his lordship's fine physique he is sure to pull through, whatever the nature of his illness. He is the kind of man to make a good fight for life."

The candles were lighted. The footman reappeared, sleepier than ever, to put out the lights in the sitting-room. The little party dispersed, the two ladies to their distant apartments, the captain to his room close by, and silence and darkness came down upon the lonely country house.

CHAPTER III.

HOW CAPTAIN DONELLY MET THE GHOST.

In spite of the fact that he was in a house whose master lay seriously ill—a fact which, no doubt, ought to have saddened him—Oscar Donelly was in excellent spirits as he paced slowly about the spacious cedar bedroom in the cheerful firelight. He had just made a discovery which had gladdened him, which opened up a bright vista of possible happiness. He had found out that his romantic passion for Beatrice Halverdene — the flame which had been fed by absence and fond imaginings—had burnt itself out, and that a newer and brighter flame had risen from the ashes of the old love.

He was in love with Lucilla—Lucilla, with whom he had an indisputable right to be in love if he pleased, and who was free to respond to his passion. Lucilla, who by the brightness

of her smiles and the friendly accents of her voice, by all her pretty cares for his comfort, and the unqualified cordiality of her welcome, had shown him that he was by no means disagreeable in her eyes.

He walked up and down in the fireglow, thinking of her looks, her words, her vivacious turns of speech, her arch smiles, her shrewd common sense; and anon meditating ways and means, and wondering whether he were financially worthy. He was neither rich nor poor. A dear old maiden aunt had left him an income which made him independent of his father, who had a small estate in County Limerick which must come to his only son by-and-by. The look-out was by no means desperate. He could afford to sell out and settle in Yorkshire, if Lucilla wanted to be near her sister. He had seen a good deal of hard fighting. He loved his profession, and would leave the army with regret; but Lucilla was worth a sacrifice. He was sure she would want to stay near her sister. She was the stronger spirit, the protector, the guardian angel. One brief hour of Halverdene's society had been enough to show

him that some such sustaining influence was needful for Halverdene's wife.

He replenished his fire, heaping up the coals from a big copper scuttle, and looked about the room, admiring the play of light and shadow on the rich brown wainscote, the bright glints on the green silk curtains and pierced brass fender.

He had forgotten all ghostly traditions when he lay down to rest, full of happy fancies about the home that he was to create for Lucilla and himself within a few miles of Halverdene. A smallish house would do, if it were pretty, and picturesque as to situation. There must be a good stable, and some shooting; and no doubt he would have the run of the Halverdene covers.

The bed was of the old-fashioned luxurious order. A delightful bed for a good sleeper, a downy paradise for the first half-hour, but after that half-hour a couch of fever and unrest to the wakeful occupant. Happily, Oscar was tired with many hours of journeying on the top of stage coaches, and, while bodily weary, he had a mind at ease, no carking cares to pluck him from the verge of slumber's comfortable abyss. So for

him the bed of downy feathers was the gate of paradise, and he was speedily threading dream-land's fairest labyrinth, albeit Lucilla had christened that very chamber the room of dreadful dreams.

He had laughed at the notion of supernatural manifestations. He had slept the long deep sleep of youth and health and hope.

A wan and sickly daylight was in the room when he woke suddenly to a revelation of horror, which in its spectral hideousness and its grim reality was worse than any vision of dread that Lucilla's stories had suggested to his imagination last night. A figure was kneeling upon the bed, crouching over him, with the strong grip of a burning hand upon his throat. A face, pallid and ghastly, was bending down close against his face, and two fiery eyes were glaring into his eyes.

If this were the ghost, verily it was a vision of fear to bring death or madness upon any young and sensitive creature that looked upon it. He who had never quailed before the Afghan guns, the savage Afghan faces, felt his blood run cold and his heart beat faster.

His first thought between sleeping and waking was, "No wonder the children died!" Then, as the shadows of sleep were shaken off, reason reasserted herself.

Could a ghost's hand hold him as this hand was holding him? Would a ghost's breath sound thick and laboured like the panting breath he felt upon his face; and was that hideous sound of grinding teeth a sound of any spiritual visitant? No: common sense told him that this was no inexplicable impalpable horror, but a very real and very human assailant—a madman, with one hand clawing him by the throat, and the other hand uplifted and flourishing an open razor.

It was not till he had torn himself free from the clutch of those burning fingers and had leapt to the other side of the wide bedstead, that he recognized his assailant as Lord Halverdene.

In the struggle to free himself he had thrown his enemy from the bed to the floor. He scrambled to his feet immediately, and the two men stood looking at each other with the width of the bed between them, one with a deadly weapon in his hand, the other totally unarmed.

Oscar looked despairingly towards the fireplace, which was on Halverdene's side of the bed. To reach it and get possessed of that useful weapon for emergencies, the poker, he must pass the madman, who stood at the corner of the bedstead ready with his razor, grinning and muttering, his body stooping forward, like an Indian trapper lying in wait for his quarry. He had wounded himself in the scuffle on the bed, and the blood was pouring from a gash on his cheek. He was in his night-shirt, with bare feet.

The bell-rope was on Oscar's side of the bed. He pulled it violently, and in that violence destroyed all chance of communicating his peril by means of the bell, for the hook and loop had both rusted with disuse, and that one sharp tug brought down the bell-rope. No hope there.

Should he try to parley with his foe—try to talk reasonably with a man who was evidently for the time being a homicidal maniac thirsting for his blood? That blood-bedabbled face mopping and mowing at him yonder by the bedpost, that threatening hand with the razor, did

not promise much advantage from the force of persuasion.

The faint and sickly light that filtered through the close-drawn blinds told Oscar that it was, at latest, five o'clock. He and the maniac were perhaps the only mortals stirring in the rambling old house. He remembered the long narrow corridor, the isolated position of the room in which he had slept.

"God knows how far off the occupied rooms may be," he thought. "I shall be massacred here, and nobody the wiser, till the footman brings my shaving water at eight o'clock."

He had time to think this while he stood at bay, considering what was his best course. He would give the wretched man a chance, he thought, before encountering violence with violence.

"My dear Halverdene, this is too absurd!" he said, in a loud firm voice, looking fixedly at the gibbering face by the bedpost. "What have I done to offend you that you should break in upon me in the middle of the night? It's a curious kind of hospitality, after having invited me to take you unawares. By Jove! you have taken

me unawares!" he added, trying to laugh off the situation, with that blood-stained face staring at him.

"My wife's lover," muttered Halverdene—"my wife's lover! Kill him! kill him! kill him! That's what the devil said when he woke me out of my sleep just now—kill him! But Turner had hidden my pistols, and had locked my dressing-case with the razors for every day in the week—Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. To-day's Wednesday, ain't it? I wanted Wednesday's razor, to cut your throat; but the box was locked—curse that man of mine!"

All this was uttered rapidly, and sounded more like a monkey's chattering than human speech. Donelly was looking about him for a weapon, and as Halverdene came towards him with a wild leap, razor uplifted, he snatched up a heavy chippendale chair, flung it straight at his assailant, knocking him down, and made a rush for the door.

The door was locked, the key gone. The madman had struggled up on to his knees, and was laughing at him, pointing at the door.

"Turner hid the pistols, and I hid the key,"

he said. "We'll have it out! We'll have it out! I can cut your throat with your own razor as well as with mine for Wednesday. We'll have it out!"

He was upon his feet by this time, and bounding across the room like a stag. Donelly remembered that his pistol-case was in a saddle-bag that had been left in the hall. Before he could reach the hearth to snatch the poker the madman's clutch was upon him, and the razor would have been at his throat had not the assailant interrupted the business in hand by a violent peal of laughter at the facetiousness of the situation. That laughter gave Oscar time to grapple his foe; and then came a fight for life, reason against unreason, the well-knit limbs and hardened sinews of athletic youth, matched against the hypernatural strength of lunacy in a frame impaired by habitual intemperance.

The razor seemed everywhere. It wounded both men, again and again. They were blinded with each other's blood. Again and again Oscar threw off his foe, and made his despairing rush for door or window, but that foe was always too quick for him. Before he could tear open the

casement or batter down the door, the madman had him in his clutch again, and the fight had to be fought again.

The noise, the fury of it, the crashing of chairs, the thud of footsteps, should have waked the seven sleepers, Oscar thought in his despair. Now and again he made a monstrous effort and called aloud for help; but breathless and choking as he was, the cry was not loud enough to reach the end of the corridor, and the grey light was only just beginning to brighten into broader day.

He fought for his life, as a man to whom life was newly and wonderfully dear—and fell at last, aching in every bone, bruised and battered, as if he had been broken on the wheel: fell with Lucilla's name upon his lips, in the last moment of consciousness, which he believed the last moment of life.

"Lucilla!" echoed the savage, glaring down at him. "That's his hypocrisy."

His foe lying at his feet senseless, and to all appearance dead, Lord Halverdene looked stupidly at the razor, dripping blood, and then let it fall.

He had forgotten to cut his victim's throat. He had also forgotten where he had hidden the key of the door, which was lying in the ashes under the grate; so he opened a window, and clambered out of it into the dewy garden, in his night raiment and with bare feet.

Before that deadly struggle in the cedar-room was finished, the butler who had been told off to take charge of Lord Halverdene, turn and turn with his lordship's body-servant, had awakened from a nap in his easy-chair, and had missed his patient from the bed where he had lain tossing, and muttering, and groaning, and whimpering all night, a victim to delirium tremens in its worst form.

When the watcher dropped asleep the door was locked, the key artfully hidden behind the candlestick on the mantelpiece; but not so artfully as to prevent Halverdene's finding it and opening the door of his prison. He had seen the man put the key there, with an elaborate pretence of looking for a box of matches; and he had waited his opportunity of getting out of the room.

He had a fixed idea in his mind, engendered of a conversation he had heard overnight from the adjoining dressing-room. The door of communication between the two rooms had been left ajar while the watcher ate his supper, brought to him by a housemaid, who explained that the reason she was so late in bringing the "tray" was the unexpected arrival of her ladyship's cousin, Captain Donelly, from the north.

"I've had to get his room ready," said the housemaid; "they've put him in the cedar-room—because it's furthest from this end of the house. He won't hear his lordship's goings on."

"Ah," said the butler, "he makes a pretty hullaballoo sometimes, I can tell you. I shall be very glad when the nurse comes from York."

That name of Donelly had been the red rag to the mad bull. In the first year of his marriage, some one had said something about Oscar Donelly which had sown a germ of jealousy in Halverdene's mind.

Civil as he had been to Donelly at York—ostentatiously civil—the embers of angry feeling had been smouldering, and with the drink-

madness, they burst into sudden blaze, and the madman had but one thought — how to be revenged on his wife's first sweetheart.

The rest followed in natural sequence. Through the weary night of fever and unrest the patient watched his watcher as he sat in the easy-chair, now attentive to every movement of the restless form upon the bed, now trying to beguile his own weariness by spelling through a county paper. Halverdene had watched his custodian till the man fell asleep, and had seized the opportunity of escape.

They found him in the gardens, exhausted, and shivering in every limb, blood-stained from head to foot. He had not been in a good plight before, but this morning's work hastened the inevitable end. The wild excitement, the chill of that quarter of an hour in the garden, in the sunless dawn, half naked, barefoot on the wet grass—these experiences were fatal; and within a month of that conflict in the haunted room Lord Halverdene was a dead man, and Lady Halverdene had descended to the minor position of a childless dowager.

She had her own fortune, and she had Lucilla, and the devoted friendship of Oscar Donelly, Lucilla's affianced husband.

The struggle with the madman had left its mark upon the captain in more than one scar, which, although not so deep as a sabre-cut, would be slow to disappear; while the loss of blood from the cuts and gashes inflicted at close quarters had resulted in a serious attack of low fever which detained him at the village inn, where he was removed on the morning of his adventure, until a month after his lordship's funeral.

During that long and wasting illness, and tedious convalescence, Lucilla was his guardian angel. She and her maid went every day to supervise his rustic attendants and his faithful soldier servant, who had followed his master from the north, and who proved himself an admirable nurse.

The captain was just able to accompany his cousins to London when they left Halverdene, which had now passed into the possession of the dead man's uncle, a dry-as-dust county magistrate and scientific farmer, with a stout, homely wife and a prodigious family of children,

descending in an unbroken chain from the accomplished eldest daughter of nineteen, to the prattling infant of two and a half.

When this gentleman and his wife came to take possession of Halverdene House, there was a tremendous exploration of rooms, and a tremendous talk of where such and such members of the ruddy-cheeked and healthy band should be bestowed. If there was one point upon which the new Lord Halverdene valued his own intelligence more than another, it was his profound mastery of the laws of health. He was a perambulating book of extracts from Andrew Combe and Southwood Smith.

"Sleep in a ground-floor bedroom! My children!" exclaimed his lordship, contemplating the cedar-room, which the housekeeper informed him had been once a nursery, and which she suggested might again serve for the same purpose, so many of the upstair bedrooms being wanted for young ladies and gentlemen, tutor, and governesses. "Does the woman think I am mad? A ground-floor room, on a level with the garden, a north-east aspect, and on clay! A murderous room!"

The housekeeper shook her head, gave a deep sigh, and on being interrogated told how that room was a haunted room, and had on more than one occasion proved fatal to the race of Halverdene.

"And yet no one has ever put a name to the ghost, or said what it was like," concluded the housekeeper.

"Ghost—bosh! fatal—yes, no doubt. This room would be pernicious to infant health, and possibly fatal to infant life. I know what country houses are—cesspools under drawing-rooms, rotten brick drains. None of my family will be allowed to occupy this old wing. Ceilings low, floors too near the earth, windows with only one small casement made to open; picturesque—abominable!"

His lordship the seventh baron was a great improver—a man of energetic temper who could not have endured life without something to build, improve, or spoil. He improved Beatrice Halverdene's old Caroline garden off the face of the earth; he pulled up the floor of the cedar bedroom, and was amply rewarded for his pains by finding an ancient cesspool, and a

comparatively modern brick drain, both in the loathsome condition in which neglect and ignorance left half the fine old houses in the land when Queen Victoria's reign was young.

"Shall I tell you the ghost's name?" asked the seventh Lord Halverdene, when people pestered him for the secret of the haunted room. "The stories of strange apparitions in that room are all nonsense; but there is no doubt the little children had bad dreams, and no doubt their little innocent lives were sacrificed to the criminal ignorance of their parents. The ghost's name was Typhoid Fever."

STAPYLTON'S PLOT.

Mark Stapylton was a genius; but his genius had not yet taken any tangible form. He had talked more poetry than Byron, Shelley, and Keats ever wrote; but he had not written three consecutive verses. He was two and thirty; he was just rich enough to live as he liked, where he liked, and how he liked; so why should he soil his fingers with ink for the sake of still dirtier lucre? He had made up his mind that he was some day to be famous as a writer; but he meant to take his own time.

He was a delightful talker; witty, poetical, cynical, enthusiastic; all things by turns, and nothing too long. His words fell in measured cadences, full of music. The happiest thoughts came as easily to his lips and left them as lightly as butterflies visit and leave a rose. He had a following of young men, mostly younger

than himself, who adored him; and to these in the small hours, lounging by the fire in winter, or sitting out upon the balcony in summer, he would unfold his literary schemes, and explain the books he meant to write in the future, when some final impulse should move him to the repulsive labour of penmanship.

"I have thought volumes," he said dreamily; "but the drudgery of the pen has always bored me."

He had various theories about art in literature. One theory was that the perfect novel had not been written within the last half-century. Since "Clarissa Harlowe" there had been no ideal fiction.

The perfect novel was to have no complications, was to contain only one idea, which was to dominate the whole. Mark Stapylton believed that it had been given to him to write the perfect novel of the century. That was his mission.

"The key-note of my story is despair," he said.

All his friends knew the key-note of this unwritten story of his. They knew a great deal

more than the key-note. They were familiar with every detail. He had talked his novel to them over and over again in the small hours when the stars were shining above the dark river; when the electric light was burning in the tower yonder, and the Commons were quarrelling in the senate-house below; and when the tower was dark and the House was empty; when summer winds were whispering in the leafy boughs on the Embankment; and when winter snow lay white there. Nature had her periodic transitions, but Mark Stapylton's unwritten romance was always the same. His idea had come upon him suddenly, in a flash of inspiration, one summer dawn when his friends had left him after a long night of cigarettes and talk. He sat upon the balcony of his chambers in Adelphi Terrace, smoking his last cigarette, leaning his folded arms upon the iron rail, and looking out dreamily over the river and the bridges, and the housetops, all glorified by that pearly light of dawn; and his plot came upon him.

He thought it was new and original. It was not. Rather was it one of the oldest stories in

the world; but a story that has always a morbid fascination—the story of a woman's despair.

"Perhaps it was the sight of Waterloo Bridge which suggested the image I saw there," he told his friends. "It was a vision rather than an idea. I saw a woman standing in one of the recesses of the bridge, staring down at the water with all the history of her life looking out of her eyes. She was pale as a corpse, but lovely even in her pallor. Suddenly she sprang upon the stone seat, and was on the point of throwing herself over the parapet, when I caught her in my arms.

"Remember, I saw this in the spirit, and not in the flesh. I was sitting on my balcony all the time, arms folded, head leaning forward in a reverie. The woman on the bridge and the man on the bridge were shadows.

"I saved her from the river. I sat down beside her on the stone bench, and talked to her and comforted her, or tried to comfort her; but nothing I could say, no hope that I could offer, could move her from her stony despair.

"I took her home with me in the dawn—in the rosy glow of sunrise. I tell you again,

Mortimer," glaring at one of his friends who was inclined to be facetious, "the man on the bridge and the woman on the bridge were shadows. I led her home to these lodgings, and gave up my room to her, and treated her as if she were a forsaken princess and I were King Arthur."

"Arthur was a muff," said Mortimer; "all my sympathies are with Launcelot."

"What became of her?" asked another friend.

"I haven't yet made up my mind," said Stapylton, becoming particularly dreamy at this juncture. "Her destiny wavers in my fancy as the starshine flickers on the wall yonder," pointing with his cigarette to the white-walled houses in the distance; "but in any case she will die. Nothing I can do will save her. The key-note of my story is despair. Past hope, past cure. She must die. All her thoughts trend towards death as a river trends towards the sea. She will die. How, or when, or where I know not; but death is her inevitable doom."

"It will not make a long story," said Baker, a prosaic youth, who adored Stapylton without understanding him.

"Length is no element in a perfect romance," retorted Mark; "but if I chose to make my novel as long as 'Clarissa Harlowe,' I could do it with such a plot."

No one ventured to suggest that the plot was hackneyed.

"There's not much incident," said one blasphemous driveller.

"Incident!" cried Mark, withering him by a look. "What has incident to do with æsthetic fiction?"

"Ah, if you are going to be æsthetic," said Mortimer, "that is quite another thing."

Stapylton dreamt of his plot by night, and brooded over it by day. As he never confronted it in black and white it seemed to him peerlessly beautiful. There were no gaps in the interest. There were no prosaic passages. There was no padding. It all flowed smoothly and harmoniously, like fine music. To him it seemed like a sonata by Beethoven, suffused melody. The woman looked, the man spoke. The man looked, the woman spoke. The story was one eternal interweaving of impassioned looks and poetical

words. The moonlight shone over it. The stars gleamed upon it. The river ran beneath it like an accompaniment of music. Everything was dim and mystic and beautiful; and the woman's face haunted Mark Stapylton in his slumbers.

Night after night he enlarged upon this theme to his friends. They admired him too much to be bored. He seldom repeated himself, though the subject was ever the same. He had always something new to say. His heroine was not a woman only, but a type of all fallen women—who fall once, like Gretchen, and despair eternally. All the metaphysics of a woman's life were involved in Mark Stapylton's unwritten romance.

"Upon my soul," he cried, one night on the balcony, "I am almost afraid to write that story. The effect upon the world will be tremendous."

"And yet I have never heard that *Hamlet* or *Faust* created any social convulsion," said Mortimer, who prided himself upon being a cynic.

"Have you ever heard of a book called 'Werther,' and of the men who shot themselves

after they had read that book?" asked Stapylton.

"I can fancy a man shooting himself rather than read 'Werther,'" replied the cynic, "but I can't imagine his being sorry he had finished it."

Years drifted by. Mark Stapylton gained in talent and popularity with the passage of time. He read enormously; he talked almost as much as he read; he criticized other men's books in two or three of the most advanced periodicals of his day; but his own book remained unwritten.

"Poor creature!" he would say, when he had annihilated a second-rate novelist. "Some day I will show him what a novel ought to be!" And the novel to be written in the future was always the same novel. The woman sitting on the bridge, with a history behind her—great Heaven, what a history—and nothing but death in the foreground! What history, he knew not; what manner of death, he knew not. Definite facts there were none in his poetic mind. He only saw the woman in her woe-begone loveliness. He only imagined the history,

with its infinite tragedy, vague, terrible, dark as that dread underworld which Virgil and Dante have depicted.

The fact that not so much as a line of his story was written troubled him not at all. It would all come in good time. The story was a part of himself.

"I am like one of those flowering agaves on the Rivièra," he said; "for the first few years there is only foliage. Then all at once the tall beautiful stem shoots up from the heart of the clustering leaves, and the flower opens—the bloom and glory of a single summer—opens, and fades, and dies."

"I hope you are not going to die when you have finished your novel," said Baker.

"Who knows?" replied Mark Stapylton, with his dreamy air.

One night his friends sat with him later than usual; but even when they had left him he was in no humour for going to bed. He sat upon his balcony, smoking, and watching the ripple of the stream and the broken reflection of the stars. All was dark in the houses on the

opposite shore. The town was wrapped in sleep; and a faint cold grey in the east told him that night was on the edge of morning.

Mark Stapylton loved that pure, cold light of earliest dawn.

"I will go for a stroll on the Embankment," he said to himself, feeling that sleep was impossible.

He sauntered up and down the broad pavement for half an hour in the steely light, enjoying the silence and the solitude, and the muffled murmur of the tide flowing gently by beneath the granite parapet. To him London was as romantic as Constantinople or Venice.

"It is a city that teems with the histories of human hearts," he said.

The light yonder behind St. Paul's grew colder and clearer, and took a bluer lustre, like damascened steel, as Mark Stapylton turned on to Waterloo Bridge. He admired that bridge as Canova had admired it, for its elegant simplicity and classic perfection of outline: yet he thought of it with a deeper interest as the bridge of sighs; the parapet from which so many a maddened sinner had leapt the gulf betwixt

life and death, and gone to meet the Great Unknown.

He was midway between the two shores when he heard the rustle of a woman's garments close to him, and, springing into the nearest recess, he was just in time to seize that fluttering skirt, and to arrest its wearer in the act of throwing herself over the parapet.

She was standing above him on the stone bench, her gown flapping in the fresh breath of morning, her tall, slim figure straight as a reed, outlined sharply against the steel-blue sky.

"Let me go!" she cried, with a choking sob, struggling for release, persistent in her quest of death.

Mark Stapylton was a big man, and he made no more of her light form than if she had been a lily. He lifted her off the bench and seated her beside him there, breathless and powerless in his grasp.

When once she was seated by his side his tone was placid almost to indifference. He eyed her steadily as a keeper eyes his patient.

Yes, this was the woman of his vision: a

woman with an unutterable history; beautiful exceedingly; young in years, but old in the tragedy of life. This was she. The first half of his novel was before him, in the flesh. There was an awfulness in the sensation of seeing his idea individualized thus. He looked at the woman with interest mixed with horror. He felt as if she and her mute despair were his own creation. Lo, he had invented this suffering creature. She was to drink the cup of anguish which he had brewed for her.

"I am very sorry for your distress of mind," he said, after a long pause; "but I hope you will abandon the thought of—of what you were going to do just now. There is always time for *that*. Life is full of chances."

"Not for me," she answered; and the three words thrilled him, so exquisite was the melancholy music of her voice.

"Nay, believe me," he urged, "there are always chances. There are always unexpected turns in the crooked lane we call life. Death is final. There is time enough for that!"

She sat looking straight before her in the morning light—facing the glory of the east,

where the steely blue was growing opalescent, while a faint pink glow was creeping up from behind the purple dome of the great church yonder. She did not argue with him, or answer him in any wise, but sat there like a statue; so that he began to wonder whether she were verily flesh and blood, or only the vision of his own imaginings which simulated reality.

Yet she *had* spoken. Never could he forget the music of that voice.

His eyes dwelt long upon the beauty of her face, the delicate profile, the heavy eyelids and dark lashes, the broad, low forehead from which the raven hair was pushed back carelessly under the shabby little black bonnet, as if the woman had long ceased to take any thought about her beauty or her dress. Her clothes were worn to rustiness, but Stapylton's experienced eye perceived indications of a vanished prosperity—the traces of a fashionable dressmaker in the threadbare gown, the cachet of style in the small neat bonnet, shabby as it was.

Presently he saw that she was shivering.

"You are cold, I fear," he said kindly, remarking the thin summer mantle, which was

no adequate clothing for the early morning, albeit the month was June.

"The night has been so long!" she answered vaguely, by which he understood that she had been wandering about for hours, and was chilled to the bone.

He was wearing no loose wrap that he could offer her, and it tortured him to see her shiver.

"My chambers are over there," he said with a motion of his head towards the terrace. "I should be so glad if you would accept my hospitality till the afternoon. It would be a pleasure to me to brew you some coffee,—and then—there might be something hit upon—some expedient which would make life more agreeable to you."

He tried to speak lightly, to put her at her ease, if possible; but she did not even look at him. Her reply proved, however, that she had heard him.

"You are very kind to a nameless stranger," she said; "but you cannot help me. I am past all that. The night is over. It will be warmer presently. Pray do not trouble yourself about me."

All this was spoken without the slightest change of expression or of attitude. The words followed each other slowly, with a mechanical air.

"I cannot help feeling troubled about you!" he said; "and I cannot consent to leave you alone here—after—after your impulse of just now. I must insist upon your accepting the shelter of my rooms until the day has begun, and some better shelter can be found for you. I hope you can believe that I am a gentleman, and that I offer you this trifling hospitality in honour and good faith."

There was something in his manner which influenced her more than his words—a decided tone which was almost a command.

"Come," he said, seeing that she wavered.

He rose from the stone bench, and she rose with him, obeying him as a child obeys a master. He slipped his arm through hers and led her slowly along the bridge, and down the steps to the Embankment, and then, almost in silence, to the house in which he lived.

"My rooms are rather high in the world," he said, as he struck a match in the hall, watching her furtively all the time, as if he

feared that she might rush out of the house and escape him.

She showed no sign of any such intention, but followed him submissively up the staircase.

He turned the key in his door and went in, his hand still upon her shoulder, always apprehensive that she might try to elude him, slip away in the grey dimness of the staircase, and vanish like a vision of the night.

First, a small dark lobby, full of coats, and hats, and sticks; then the den, which was library, dining-room, and smoke-room all in one: a large, old-fashioned room lined with bookshelves, and sketches, engravings, etchings, photographs, a plaster statuette here and there, a large desk in front of the window scattered with loose papers and French novels, books on the chairs, books on the floor, books everywhere. A large old easy chair standing beside the open window, with a shabby velvet dressing-gown flung over the back, and a pair of slippers: verily and indeed a "den," in which the man without ties or obligations of any kind lived after his own fashion, and took his ease in his own way.

The room had always looked to him the picture of comfort on returning to it from the outer world. This morning for the first time it had a dismal air, and a keen chilling breath came creeping in at the open window.

He went over to the fireplace and lighted a spirit-lamp. He had locked the door of the lobby on the inside, and had put the key in his pocket. He had no longer any fear of her eluding him.

"I am going to make you what our neighbours across the Channel call a grog," he said, putting on a cheery air, though that stealthy cold, creeping up from the river and the eastward marshes, had chilled him to the bone.

"Please do not trouble about me. I cannot take anything to eat or to drink," she answered, with a tone so final that his little attempt at warmth and comfort was nipped in the bud. He had hoped much from a tumbler of hot brandy and water; had hoped to bring colour back to those marble cheeks, and to unfix those stony eyes; but that positive rejection paralyzed him. He could but submit.

"You will be ever so much better after a

few hours' rest," he said; and then he went over and flung open the door leading into his bedroom, which fronted south, like his sitting-room, and opened on the same broad iron balcony.

"There is my room," he said, with quiet kindliness, "altogether at your service between now and noon. I can sleep very well on that sofa over there," indicating a roomy old couch in a corner. "I have often done as much to oblige a belated friend. Be assured you will be safe under my roof; and if you choose to go away to-morrow afternoon without having given me your confidence, I will not hinder you. So far as a few pounds will help you on your way, I am yours to command; but I will not seek to pry into your trouble."

"You are a good man," she answered gravely, with a faint quiver of her rigid lips, but without lifting her eyes to his face. "I will accept your shelter for a little while, but I won't take your money. It could not help me."

"Do you mean that no one—nothing—can help you?"

"No one—nothing!"

She was gone, and the door closed with a hollow sound in the morning stillness. Doors can make so much of themselves on occasion.

He went over to the window and shut it, and drew the thick Arabian curtains to exclude that bright, cold morning light, and to give himself at least an idea of warmth. Then he rolled himself in a lion-skin, which sprawled over the sofa, the gift of a schoolfellow who had developed into a mighty hunter in African deserts; and then he tried to sleep.

Not so easy to accomplish, that magical journey from waking to slumber, in the summer dawn, with a brain overwrought, and a heart beating at a gallop. What could he think of as he lay there in the lion's skin staring at the bright, cold light filtering through the striped curtain? What could he think of except his plot?

Here was his plot embodied. The woman steeped in despair—the woman whose beauty had been her bane—whose life was one long series of mistakes and miseries. The woman who had been fatal to others, and to whom others had been fatal. There she was, born, as it were,

out of his poetic fancy, like Minerva from the head of Jove; his very dream incarnate; in the loveliest saddest shape that ever poet had conceived or painter realized.

"The story began in despair, and the story must end in despair."

That is what he had told his friends and himself whenever he talked of that novel which was to make men and women forget all other novels of the last half-century. "She must die," he had told those scoffers. "All her thoughts trend towards death, as the rivers trend towards the sea."

And now she had risen out of his fancy, like Galatea under Pygmalion's chisel, and he would have given ten years of his own life to save her.

"Why is death inevitable for her?" he asked himself. "Is there no such thing as pity? Are the Fates inexorable always? Is there no repentance, no forgiveness, no new beginning in life? There is, there is—there is forgetfulness of a cruel past, there is hope of a bright future. What if she has sinned and is repentant, and will cleave to virtue, and love it as only those can

do who have walked through the fiery furnace of vice? Who else can know the beauty of innocence? who else can feel the divinity of holiness? To know all is to forgive all. I, who know the world in all its worst phases—*I* can pardon and pity yonder bruised reed, yonder snapped lily."

And then he let his thoughts wander vaguely in a waking dream. He had saved her from the peril of a night: he would shield and shelter her from the perils of a lifetime. He would find some safe seclusion; some lowly, honest home; some peasant's cottage in a fair country, where she might dwell for a year or two, purifying her spirit in a lovely solitude, in sweet communings with Nature. He would visit her there now and then—not too often. He would lead her mind into the paths of the higher culture: he would teach her to forget all she had been, and to aspire to the highest type of intellectual womanhood.

And then some day, with a mind newly developed, a heart new-born, beauty purified, soul exalted, she would turn to him with innocent, half-conscious love; and he would be

richly rewarded for all his care, and all his anxiety, by the sweetest wife man ever won for himself.

That was the new ending of his story; inartistic, perhaps, but full of gladness. He sank asleep in the glow of that imagined happiness, and slept soundly.

The sleep was so profound that it seemed long, though after events showed that it did not last half an hour.

He was awakened suddenly by a strange noise. He started up from the sofa, thinking that the French window had burst open in a gust of wind.

No. All was still again, and the striped curtains hung motionless between him and the light.

He glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece. A quarter to five.

What could that noise have been? His dim, half-sleeping memory was of a crashing sound, close at hand. He went to the door of the bedroom and listened. All was still, but the window was open, for he could feel the morning air blowing keen through the crack of the door, and

he could hear faint, distant sounds of the newly awakened city.

He stood for nearly a quarter of an hour, close to the door, listening intently, and uneasy with a vague uneasiness—scarce realizing why or what he feared.

If he could have heard her stir or murmur in her sleep—if he could have heard breath or sound to tell him that she was lying peacefully upon his bed—he would have been content; but the silence scared him.

He stood listening until the beating of his own heart became agony: then, forgetting everything but that vague agony of fear, he opened the door suddenly and dashed into the room.

It was empty. The bed was undisturbed, not a wrinkle in the neatly spread coverlet. The French window stood wide open. The shabby little mantle and bonnet which he had noticed as he sat by the nameless girl's side on the bridge had been flung carelessly upon a chair. There was no other sign of her presence.

He rushed out upon the balcony, and looked down into the empty street.

She was there—lying face downward on the

pavement, where she had flung herself in her obstinate despair; "all her thoughts trending towards death as the rivers trend towards the sea."

There was an inquest; but the inquiry threw no new light upon the history of the suicide. There was nothing about her person—no card, letter, or scrap of writing of any kind to indicate her identity. And the beautiful face had been marred and crushed out of all form and meaning on the stony pavement. The mother who bore her could not have recognized *that*.

They buried her in a nameless grave; and Mark Stapylton's novel will remain unwritten till Doomsday.

"I have lived it," he said, with a shudder. "That is enough."

HIS OLDEST FRIENDS.

PART I.

Maxime de St. Vallier was no longer a young man when he succeeded to the family estate of St.Vallier le Roi, which had belonged to his race from the time of the Fronde, when a certain Hector St. Vallier commanded a regiment of light cavalry in Condé's army, and in the course of an adventurous career, including two wealthy marriages, managed to accumulate a considerable fortune, and to leave behind him the château and lands of St. Vallier le Roi, adjoining the insignificant Bourg of that name, which lies ten miles from a station on the Lyons railway and in the heart of a richly wooded district. There is no more beautiful château in France of its size than this of St. Vallier, with its four tall towers under steep conical roofs, its carved balconies and oriel

windows, its decorated gables and floriated iron-work; a château planted on a knoll that lifts the dainty edifice just high enough above the rolling woods and fertile valley to make it a picturesque point in the landscape.

Maxime inherited the estate and a handsome fortune in stocks and shares from an eccentric bachelor to whom he was but distantly related, but who had been passionately in love with his mother before her marriage, and who had been refused by her in favour of a much poorer man. It may be that Maxime de St. Vallier's early manhood would have taken a different and a better course had he known all about this good fortune which was waiting for him in the future; if he had known that at nine and thirty years of age he would be rich in wealth and lands, and endowed with all that weight and respectability which dignify the possessor of a fine estate.

"I should have tried to educate myself up to my fortune," he said, "and instead of wasting my nights in singing-cellars and dancing-gardens I should have been studying scientific agriculture and the landed interest. But the old fellow never took any notice of me, and I thought no

more of him than of the Grand Lama of Thibet or the Khan of Tartary."

Yes, he would have shaped his life differently, and might have shaped it better had he but known. The vision of a sweet pale face and pathetic violet eyes rose before him in the first hour of his new and unexpected fortune. That lovely face had vanished for ever, as he thought, from Maxime St. Vallier's adoring gaze, even years before the coming of his inheritance. He had loved the only daughter of one of Napoleon the Third's generals, had modestly offered himself and the possibilities of a journalistic career, which had been full of golden opportunities, all flung to the winds. He had enlarged upon the great things he might and would do in literature and politics if he were but urged by the noblest incentive to labour, the responsibilities of a husband who idolized his wife.

General Leroux listened to his fervid harangue with calm politeness, and smiled the bland pitying smile of age that has forgotten the sensations and dreams of youth.

"I cannot marry my daughter to possibilities, however brilliant," he said. "I am an old man.

I should die before your efforts had begun to realize these great rewards which you say are within your power to gain. I should die harassed by the apprehension that my daughter and her offspring would starve. I am a poor man, remember. Lucie's *dot* would not do more than furnish an apartment in a respectable street. And you, sir, admit that you have saved nothing, though you tell me your earnings on the press have been considerable."

"No, I had no motive for hoarding."

"No more had Balzac, or Alexandre Dumas, or Gerard de Nerval, or Alfred de Musset, or a good many more whom I remember—geniuses all; and since you have lived to the age of two and thirty without having put by anything out of your earnings, you can hardly ask me to believe in your capacity for saving money in the future, when your expenses are to be increased by the maintenance of a wife and a possible family."

"I have flung away as much money as would support a wife and a home every year of my life, since I was five and twenty."

"Yes, you have had a brilliant career, I know, and you have taken life at breakneck time,

as if it were a waltz at the Mabille. I admire your talents, my dear St. Vallier, and I like you, in any other relation of life than as a possible husband for my daughter. Frankly, too, the question of her future has long been quietly settled between her mother and me on the one part, and a couple of old friends of ours on the other part."

"Does Lucie know? Is Lucie content?" questioned St. Vallier, with pallid lips and fast-beating heart.

No, he was sure she had been told nothing of this parental scheme, even before his question was answered. He knew that she loved him, and would marry no one else of her own free will.

"Lucie will know all in good time, and she is too dutiful to oppose the wishes of her parents," replied the general.

He added some friendly words, he grasped the lover's cold hand, and Maxime went out into the streets of Paris, feeling as if he had a stone in his breast in the place where his heart had beaten with glad emotions when he entered General Leroux's house an hour earlier.

He knew Lucie Leroux well enough—knowing

her soft pliable nature, her love of father and mother, her severely religious training at an Ursuline convent—to be very sure that she would obey her parents and marry the suitor they had chosen for her. It was hopeless to fight against his fate; the bourgeoise Nemesis called Prudence barred his path to happiness.

He went off to Algiers with one of the most brilliant imaginative writers of the day, and in the society of that gifted young man, and amidst scenes of romantic beauty, he tried to live down his love, and at least succeeded in finding life endurable, and full of inspiration for his pen.

He was still in Africa when he saw the announcement of Lucie's marriage. The bridegroom was Charles Colnet, the junior partner in Colnet & Cie., a firm of iron-founders of established position and large wealth. Looked at from the materialistic standpoint of modern Paris the match was a good one, and General Leroux and his wife were to be congratulated upon having done remarkably well for their daughter.

Maxime's business in life was to forget her. He was not able to do that all at once, but

he was able to fling himself heart and soul into his literary work—embittered and hardened, but also strengthened by the one honourable passion of his life, a stronger and a better man for having loved nobly and in vain. From being known as one of the cleverest journalists of his day, he became famous as the author of a novel which struck a new string upon the seven-stringed lyre of earthly passion and heavenward-looking hope. It may have been this sudden blast of Fame's trumpet which made the childless old sybarite's eyes turn towards his distant kinsman; anyhow, his latest will was dated after the success of St. Villier's first and most remarkable story. When a man has been writing for eighteen years, and then in the maturity of his powers takes upon himself to write a book, it is probable that this first book will be better than anything he produces afterwards.

St. Vallier found himself a landowner of some importance, and furnished with means which justified his taking life exactly as his own inclination suggested. He might spend the greater part of his days as a man of fashion

in Paris, where he could afford to set up a bachelor establishment on the most splendid scale. He might have courted notoriety in twenty different ways in the city of pleasure; and might have won for himself that ephemeral renown which is the most brilliant and the most intoxicating of all earthly glories, while it lasts. All this he might have done, and would have done, perhaps, had fortune dropped her favours into his lap just ten years earlier. But he had lived his life, had been famous in Bohemia as the scribbler of the squib and the entre-filet, pungent criticisms and risky stories, famous in the great world as the writer of the cleverest book of the season. He had no vanities or ambitions which Paris could gratify. He told himself that he wanted restful days, the tranquil autumn of a life whose summer was faded and sped; so he settled quietly down in the Louis Treize château, and for the first year of his possession devoted himself to the almost impossible task of improving upon perfection. If he could not exactly improve he could at least elaborate. The old man who was gone had prided himself on his library, had

deemed himself a connoisseur in books and bindings; but his taste, though excellent, had been old-fashioned, and new generations are in advance of the old. So the wonderful collection of books new and old grew under the hand of the new lord, and a taste which was simpler and yet more splendid prevailed in the new acquisitions. As in the library, so in every room in the château, in gardens and stables, in home-farm and falcon-house, the improving hand was seen, the artistic taste was at work. Maxime St. Vallier made his *campagne*, as he called it, the religion of his sober middle-age. He told his friends that he only lived to expand and beautify St. Vallier le Roi.

It has been said by a French classic that the greatest luxury is that which is least observable. The perfection of the Château St. Vallier was a perfection in those minor details which in many splendid houses are neglected. Maxime's guests found themselves lapped in luxury, but were never oppressed with a too obvious splendour or profusion. Every desire, every need of humanity, was foreseen and pro-

vided for. An unsleeping *prévoyance* attended the guest from his arrival at the station till his departure from the same place. Not till his friends were comfortably seated in their railway carriage did Maxime's care, personal or vicarious, cease in their behalf; and were the journey long his attentions followed to the very end, in the shape of a carefully provided *pique-nique* basket, and as much light literature as the book-stall would furnish in the way of novelty. Hence it came to pass that a visit to St. Vallier le Roi was among the choicest privileges of the few who yet survived of that gallant band with whom Maxime had begun life at the Sorbonne and on the "Boul Mich." He had not the temperament which makes new friends, and he clung with a warm affection to those he had known in the freshness of his morning hours.

Alas! they were so sorely diminished a crew. Life on the "Boul Mich" uses itself quickly. Of Maxime's bosom-friends one had hanged himself in a blind alley; another had cut the knot of a difficulty with his razor in a miserable garret behind the church of St. Sulpice; and

more than one had been sacrificed to the demon absinthe. Three had been killed in the war and the siege, and pulmonary complaints had accounted for others. The list of those who had fallen by the wayside in that march of life from twenty to forty was appalling. St. Vallier, who was of a thoughtful temper, had many a gloomy hour in which he pondered over the days that were gone, and the friends who were numbered with the dead. It seemed to him in these hours of despondency that fortune had come too late to be of any real value.

He might perhaps have fallen into a habit of settled melancholy but for a new and most unlooked-for happiness that came to him three years after his inheritance. Charles Colnet, of Colnet & Cie., went the way of all flesh with an awful suddenness early in the spring of that year; and in the following summer Maxime met his old sweetheart at La Bourboule, ill, nervous, and fragile as a pale March primrose—shaken and scared by the shock of an unloved husband's death, childless and despondent.

There could be but one result of such a meeting. To Maxime's eye the pensive and

ailing woman was more interesting, if less lovely, than the girl he once had hoped to win. And then what exquisite delight it was for him to watch the return of the old loveliness, like the gradual glow and glory of a summer sunrise, as the widow's heart reawakened to the old love! Yes, she had loved him always, she confessed, when they parted late in September, she to return to Paris to arrange her affairs and prepare for a second wedlock, he to go back to the woods and gardens of St. Vallier, and to elaborate that which he had been elaborating for the last three years. He had to prepare the apartments of the new châteleine. Everything had been pronounced complete from garret to cellar; but nothing in existence could be good enough for the new mistress of his home and the old mistress of his heart.

The wedding was solemnized in Paris a year after Charles Colnet's death. It was a very quiet ceremonial, an arrangement in a minor key; yet the newspapers had a great deal to say about the bride and bridegroom, the wealth of the iron-foundry, the historical associations of St. Vallier le Roi; but most of all about

the lady's bridal gown and trousseau, her jewels and wedding gifts.

This was the beginning of a new existence for Maxime St. Vallier. All things took brighter colours in the sunlight of domestic happiness. But youth that is spent is spent. No man can make himself young again, least of all the man who has taken those strong years of manhood between twenty and forty at a swinging pace. The later years of that man are like the tired hunter's return stablewards after a grand run with the hounds. The horse may have done prodigies between noon and sundown; but he has had his day, and must creep quietly home to rest. The most famous physician in Paris told St. Vallier to be careful of himself.

"You have burnt the lamp of life rather too fiercely," he said; "there is, however, oil enough left for a good many years to come if you will only husband it."

This was a sage warning, but it is difficult for a man who has won the fruition of his fondest hopes to remember the shadow on the dial, creeping on with slow, inevitable progress.

St. Vallier gave himself up to the gladness of his new life, and to the delight of his wife's society. She was charmed with her surroundings at the château, pleased at the idea of spending the greater part of every year in that tranquil home, far from the excitements and dissipations of Republican Paris. Her husband's friends were her friends; and although there was a faint flavour of the Quarter Latin and the Bal Bullier still clinging to those old comrades, they were all of them men of intellect, and some of them men of mark—poets, romancers, painters, who had made themselves famous or at least fashionable; advocates whose florid eloquence had but too often made the forger or the parricide appear rather the victim than the criminal, and had found extenuating circumstances in the darkest story of crime.

It was in the second autumn of St. Vallier's wedded life that a party of these friends arrived at the château, intent upon enjoying all the sports and pleasures which St. Vallier le Roi could afford—hawking, shooting, hunting, yea, even the music of village Orphéonistes, and

the dances at the village fairs. Maxime's friends were all men. Lucie supplied the feminine element, and brought around her half a dozen of the most elegant women in Paris: widows, or wives on furlough, fresh from their seaside holiday, or their "cure" in Auvergne or Savoy, Schwalbach or the Pyrenees.

Every one was charmed with the château. Pretty women went buzzing up and down the corridors, peering into the grim seventeenth-century turrets, fluttering up and down the corkscrew staircases, with much music of light laughter, and frou-frou of silk and lace.

Madame's friends were delighted with everything, but perhaps most of all to find that very audacious painter of Parisian boudoirs, Tolpâche, and that daring analyst of the female heart, Vivien the novelist, on the premises.

"There is something very awful in the idea of living for a fortnight in the same house with two such men," said Madame Evremonde, the banker's widow; "one feels one's principles in danger of being gradually undermined. If

Vivien's conversation is anything like his books——"

"Thank Heaven it isn't!" said St. Vallier, "or M. Vivien would be intolerable. Social analysis is a very good thing to dream and doze over, with a cigar between one's lips, and one's feet on the fender, but to have to listen to the analyst expounding his theories—*quelle corvée!*"

One of the first inquiries from the lady visitors was for the family ghost.

"Of course there is a ghost—some sad story of a jealous husband and a murdered lover, perhaps, or a faithless wife shut up in one of those too delicious turrets?" said Madame Belfort, who was stout and sentimental—a kindly adipose creature, who offered to the fashionable faiseur the problem of how to make the best of a jelly-fish.

"Unhappily, chère dame, there is no ghost."

"What! in a château built in the middle of the seventeenth century—a château built when men wore long hair, and velvet doublets, and cannon sleeves, and Point d'Alençon ruffles. That cannot be! There must be a ghost. You have not hunted up the family traditions. A house

without a ghost-story, a family without traditions, would be hardly respectable."

"I said there is no ghost, but I did not say there are no family traditions."

"There are traditions, then?" asked the stout lady.

"Yes."

"Ghostly ones?"

"There is one that savours of the supernatural; but as I never yet believed in a story of that kind when I heard it told of another man's family, I am not likely to believe in this legend because it is told of my own ancestors."

"A legend! The very word has a fascination!" cried Madame Evremonde. "Please let us hear it."

"Then you own to a ghost!" exclaimed Madame Belfort, who had the density of large bodies. "Pray show us the haunted room. I feel sure it is one of the turret-rooms, so quaint, so historical, so uncanny."

"Again, chère dame, must I protest that no ghost—not the shadow of a shade—has ever been asserted to walk these corridors, or harbour in any room, garret, or cellar of this château.

If you good ladies will graciously wait till after dinner, I will tell you the story of St. Vallier le Roi while we take our coffee."

"It is a long story, then?"

"Not very long, but too long to be told in this passage while your maids are running about with your luggage, and while my *chef* is doubtless in a fever of impatience lest the dinner should be delayed so long as to spoil his best efforts."

His guests took the hint, and ran off to their various rooms, Madame St. Vallier and her housekeeper going about with them to show them where they were lodged. Lamps were being lighted in the corridors; many wax candles were burning upon toilet tables and mantelpieces. As the great clock chimed the half-hour after six, all the windows in the château gleamed and twinkled through the October twilight. It was still early in the month. The evenings were soft and grey. The woods were still green.

The dinner was excellent. The guests were full of vivacity and light airy talk. The dining-hall, with its dark oak panelling, family portraits,

gobelin tapestry, and Henri deux pottery, was a picture which delighted the eye of Adolphe Tolpâche, the painter—a background which he was likely to use in many a little pictured *tête-à-tête*, confidential, *risqué*, suggestive. On the appearance of coffee and liqueurs, Madame Evremonde turned to her host, by whose side she was sitting.

"Your family tradition, Monsieur," she said. "The moment has come."

Maxime bowed a smiling assent.

"We'll get rid of the servants first," he murmured in her ear. "That will do, Robert," to the major-domo; "you and Jacques can put your salvers on the table yonder," pointing to a table in a recess.

The well-trained servant understood the dismissal, and at once withdrew with his underlings. As the heavy oak door closed upon them, Maxime leant forward with his folded arms on the tablecloth.

"Now then for the ghost-story," he said. "It is a ghost-story, but, I am happy to say, the ghost has nothing to do with this house. We have no haunted room from which the too-

daring guest emerges, after a self-imposed ordeal, with his hair blanched and his brain turned. Our ghosts are out-of-door ghosts. The legend of St. Vallier is the legend of the phantom char-à-bancs."

"A phantom char-à-bancs. A new manner of ghost, par Dieu. What does it do, this char-à-bancs?"

"Very little. It is supposed to be seen driving through the woods in the evening dusk; seen by the owner of the estate. A curious old-world carriage, a carriage belonging to a period in which coaches were a novelty, and when a Court beauty was known to barter her reputation for a gilt coach; a beauty of rank and social status, mark you, who had resisted every other lure."

"We know our de Grammont, *mercí*," laughed Vivian; "revenez à votre char-à-bancs."

"It is seen in the gloaming, somewhere along that wooded road which leads to the home-farm; at least, that is the traditional place. It is seen by the owner of the estate; and in that strange antiquated vehicle he sees a strange set of passengers—the friends he cared for in his youth,

the friends he valued most, the friends who have gone before."

"Que diable! Your estate is well provided," exclaimed Tolpâche. "Not a single ghost, not the old-established family spectre, but a whole company of apparitions, a coach-load of phantoms. Après, mon ami? When the lord of the soil has seen the spectral char-à-bancs, what then?"

"He is forewarned of his approaching death. If the legend is to be believed, no man ever long survived the apparition of that vehicle, the passing of those noiseless wheels."

"India-rubber tires," said Tolpâche; "a carnival trick of some *roué* St. Vallier's fast and furious friends. A thing done once, perhaps, in the wild days of the Regency, and exaggerated by rumour into a family custom. *Histoire de rire.* That is the way ancestral ghosts are made!"

"My dear Tolpâche, if you are a sceptic, so am I. I no more believe in my family apparition than you do; only these ladies wanted the story, and there it is for them."

"These ladies" were charmed with the story, and were inclined to believe in the phantom

char-à-bancs. Madame Belfort insisted upon being told in what direction the road lay by which the char-à-bancs was supposed to travel, in order that she might take her morning constitutional on that very road.

PART II.

When a man has a beautiful wife and a circle of intimates, however well he may have chosen his friends, and however long he may have known them, there is always a traitor among them. There is always one man who holds no law sacred where a lovely woman's favour is, or may be, the reward of treachery. There is always one man who disbelieves in woman's chastity, and who thinks every man's wife a possible prize, if not for other men, at least for himself.

There was one such traitor in Maxime de St. Vallier's circle, and that traitor was Vivien, the novelist, a writer who had painted duchesses from models picked out of the Parisian gutter, who had dissected and analyzed, and poetized and bedevilled his own idea of woman, evolved out of his own very nasty inner consciousness,

and who could not recognize purity when he saw it.

Hector Vivien was neither a shooting nor a hunting man, cared for neither foxhounds nor falconry. He would have bored himself to death at St. Vallier le Roi if he had been without an object. Every man who lives in the country must hunt something, even if that something be only a beetle or a butterfly. Vivien hunted Lucie St. Vallier. The calm, high-souled, beautiful woman was the quarry which he had chosen; and he fully believed that he should succeed in the chase.

"If not to-day, to-morrow." That was his motto where women were concerned. Elated by a succession of facile conquests, he thought all conquests easy. Lucie's matronly dignity was, to his mind, only the mask worn by all well-bred women. Behind the Roman wife there was always a potential Messalina.

He pursued his accustomed arts very carefully, varying his tactics in accordance with his surroundings. He was so subtle that neither husband nor wife suspected his motives. St. Vallier apologized to him for the monotony of

life at the château. "You, who care neither for hawk nor hound, must find it a very dull business," he said.

"My dear Maxime, you forget that I have to finish my novel, and find a title for it, before the end of the year. Nothing could suit me better than the repose of this uneventful life."

"I fear you did not make much progress with your story yesterday, Monsieur," said Lucie, gaily; "you were loitering about the gardens and the farm all the afternoon."

"Dear madame, I was thinking of my title. That is the hardest work of all."

It was to be observed that Vivien spent day after day in the same leisurely meandering between garden and farm, park and pleasaunce, or in accompanying the ladies of the party to distant ruins or rustic villages, or, indeed, in any direction that Madame de St. Vallier proposed for the day's drive. He was not averse from riding, was a light weight, and rode fairly well for a literary man; so, having found a mount of St. Vallier's that suited him to perfection, he took to accompanying his hostess and Madame Evremond in their morning rides,

and thus familiarized himself with every path and glade in the extensive woods.

Lucie showed him the spot where the phantom char-à-bancs was said to have appeared; a point where the footpath branched off from the road, and where a giant oak spread his gnarled and withered limbs, alive and flourishing on one side, and dead on the other—fitting landmark for a haunted spot.

Vivien was very jocose about the char-à-bancs, but Lucie checked him with a sigh.

"What if the legend were true!" she said gravely; "what if some day Maxime were to tell me he had seen the phantom carriage!"

"You would guess, dear madame, that he had supped with the widow Cliquot overnight," the novelist answered gaily. He was not going to encourage sentimentality about a husband.

October wore towards its close. A pack of English foxhounds had been brought over to a neighbouring quasi-royal château by an Irish nobleman, a man in whose family sport and fine riding were a tradition. The hounds afforded splendid sport, and the peer was a social success, dined at St. Vallier le Roi twice in a fortnight,

and made himself particularly agreeable to the ladies of the party. It was curious that, coming upon the scene as a stranger, he should have been the only visitor who saw threatened mischief in Hector Vivien's languid saunterings and close attendance upon Madame de St. Vallier and her friends.

"If I were a little more intimate with St. Vallier, I should try to open his eyes about that particular friend of his," said the peer, communing with himself as he drove home after his second dinner at the château. "A fellow who is able to sit a horse, and yet does not care for riding to hounds in such a splendid country as this, must have some darker game in view. I think I know pretty well what the Parisian novelist is aiming at."

Maxime had been completely happy during those short autumn days. He had not been husbanding his strength, for he had ridden as hard as anybody else, yet he had felt in better health than he had enjoyed for the last ten years, full of life and vigour, and with an appetite which made him think with a pitying smile of the days when he had trifled fretfully with the

choicest *entrée* at Bignon's, and disdainfully rejected the costliest *primeurs* of the season. He felt that he was rapidly acquiring the hardy vigour of the genuine *campagnard*, and that henceforth he might laugh at doctors and diagnosis.

The month was waning, and several of the visitors had left the château; but the party seemed only cosier and more lively as the circle grew smaller; "just the right number for sitting round the fire and telling stories," Maxime said, as they drew their chairs in a semi-circle about the wide hearth in the central hall, a hearth whereon burned huge logs of red fir, exhaling aromatic odours; just the right number to appreciate Lucie de St. Vallier's low sweet voice as she sang Heine's ballads, or De Musset's passionate love-songs, in the pensive hour between daylight and darkness.

> "'Ninon, Ninon, que fais tu de la vie
> Toi, qui n'a pas l'amour?"

"What does she do with her life, this tranquil, dignified châtelaine?" Vivien asked himself; she who seemed to know nothing of love—certainly not of love as he interpreted the

passion—a transient fever, prompting to all manner of falsehood and treachery; a burning fiery furnace, from which a woman emerges scathed and seared, marked with the ineffaceable brand of infamy.

The meet had been more remote than usual, and the hounds had gone in a direction that led farther and farther away from St. Vallier le Roi; so on this particular evening Maxime was riding home alone, having left his friends, Tolpâche the painter, and the advocate Bartrond, to take their own line. He knew that his wife would be full of anxieties and morbid fancies about him, should he not return till long after dark, and to stay with the hounds this afternoon would mean a very late home-coming. He had left the hounds at three o'clock, by which time they had lost their first fox and were drawing a wood fifteen miles from St. Vallier le Roi. In all probability the fox would take them farther away from that point, and the day's sport might finish with death or disappointment thirty miles from home.

Maxime was riding a second horse, which took

him homeward at the rate of seven miles an hour, and the sun was just beginning to set as he rode out of a bridle-track through a thickly planted fir wood, and came upon the carriage-road which Madame Belfort had christened the Phantom's Highway. Nothing was further from his thoughts than family traditions upon that particular evening. He was in excellent health and spirits, and was thinking how delightful it would be to get home in advance of the other men, and to enjoy a quiet hour with Lucie, *téte-à-téte*, in that quaint old turret-room which she had made her boudoir. How sweet it would be to sit beside the fire in the curious hooded chimney corner, talking confidentially, and all in all to each other, just for that one quiet hour before it was time to dress for dinner!

He rode slowly along, thinking of the woman he loved so dearly, with such a pure and placid affection; a love so strong in its unbounded faith; a love across whose brightness there had never fallen the shadow of change. He thought how blessed life had been made for him within the last three years, blest by earthly prosperity, blest how much more in this perfect and happy

union, and his heart swelled with gratitude to Providence. Lucie had reawakened in his mind the devout feelings of early boyhood, the faith learnt at his mother's knees; and now he told himself he might look forward to long years of this serene and full existence—years of prosperity, social influence, and wedded love—for all those threatening signs of nervous decay, fatigued brain, wasted strength, which had scared him when he consulted the famous doctor, had gradually disappeared, and he felt as fit for the battle of life as he had felt at five and twenty. Full of these self-congratulations, he rode slowly along the road, towards a sharp curve where the woodland opened upon a lovely glade, sloping down to a level stretch of marshy pasture, where the cows stood breast-deep in the flowering grasses.

The sun was dipping towards this grassy expanse at the bottom of the glade, a great crimson disk. As Maxime reached the turn of the road, and saw the glade in a slanting line before him, with that red orb facing him, he was startled by the sound of a horn, curiously faint, yet seeming near. Could the hounds have been

following in his direction all this time? Had the fox, as if out of sheer perversity, set his nose towards St. Vallier le Roi?

While he was asking himself this question, turning in his saddle to look back and listen, a strange chill crept through his veins, colder and more sudden than the chill that comes after the sinking of the sun, and, looking straight before him, he saw a carriage approaching, and mechanically pulled his horse out of the narrow road to make way for it. The carriage was large and heavy-looking, drawn by four horses, and neither wheels nor horses' hoofs sounded on the hard gravel road.

It drove slowly past him as he stood watching it; a char-à-bancs, filled with men whose faces were all turned towards him, pallid in the grey faint light; the face of Gerard de Nerval, who hanged himself in the Rue de la Vielle Lantèrne; the face of Alfred de Musset, who wrecked his constitution by drink and dissipation; faces of men less famous than these two—all gone before. One, his oldest, dearest, trustiest friend in the long ago, stood up in the carriage, and, looking at him earnestly, pointed with solemn gesture to

the setting sun. The red-gold edge of the orb dropped as he pointed, and the day was dead.

"*Ce cher Horace,*" sighed Maxime, as the carriage vanished into the shadows of the wood. "That means a rendezvous. We are to meet soon."

He rode homeward very slowly. He had never believed in this legend of the char-à-bancs, and yet the fact of having seen it, and the faces of his dead friends, gave him no surprise. It seemed to him, now that the thing was over, as if he had known always that he should see those familiar faces, and receive this warning of approaching death. Yet only a few minutes ago he had been rejoicing in the idea of long and happy years lying before him, a quiet leisurely journey, hand in hand with his beloved, down the hill of life. The effect of that strange vision upon him was like the effect of a blow that produces brief unconsciousness. The man who has been stunned awakens with a confused sense of time; feels as if years had gone by in those few minutes of total oblivion. Not for a moment did he try to reason away the vision, to think it a delusion of a mind pre-

possessed by that particular image. To him the thing was a truth, a positive indisputable fulfilment of the family legend. He was doomed shortly to die. In the midst of his calm delight in life the fateful summons had come, and he must obey. He could not misunderstand that look in his dead friend's face, the hand pointing to the sinking sun. For him, too, the sun of life was going down. He had fancied himself so much improved in health, so much stronger than of old. A fallacy born of a contented mind, perhaps. That decay which he had once dreaded was going on within the citadel of life. In brain, or heart, or lungs, somewhere there must be hidden mischief, and the finger of death had marked him.

"I'll see what science says of me," he thought, "and if the doctor's verdict coincides with the spectral warning, I shall know that my race is run. There is always some comfort in certainty. I will go to Paris by the Rapide to-morrow and let Bianchon overhaul me."

Having come to this decision, he put his horse at a trot, and rode rapidly home, arriving in time for a cup of tea, which Lucie called "le

five o'clock," in the turret boudoir, and for that long cosy talk with his wife, which he had anticipated. She praised him for his devotion in leaving the hounds and coming home alone, lest she should spend uneasy hours after dark. She was gay, caressing, charming, and it was exquisite happiness to snatch this hour alone with her. Not by one word or sigh did Maxime reveal the mental shock he had experienced; yet, in the midst of their light talk and laughter, he was thinking of a day near at hand when she would be sitting lonely and widowed in that room; and he was recalling the provisions of the will which he had made directly after his marriage — a will which left his wife everything.

Before going to her boudoir he had despatched a mounted messenger with a telegram, asking Dr. Bianchon to expect him at a certain hour on the following day. He would take the omnibus train from St. Vallier le Roi to Dijon that night, in time to start from Dijon by the Rapide. After much happy talk, he told Lucie that he had to go to Paris on particular business, and that he meant to travel at night, both in

going and returning, so that he might be absent for the shortest time possible.

"But you will fatigue yourself dreadfully by two night journeys!" said Lucie, growing sad at the prospect of even this brief separation.

"Not at all. I shall take a wagon-lit each way."

"Be sure you do. And you will be back——"

"The day after to-morrow, much too early for breakfast."

"I will have breakfast ready for you, however early you may be. I shall be at the station with the carriage."

"I beg that you will do no such thing. A long drive on a cold wintry morning might give you a dangerous chill!"

"I am too hardy a plant for that, Maxime. The life I lead in these delicious woods has made me as strong as a lioness!"

"My lioness!" he cried, smothering the fair bright face with kisses, "Queen of my forests and of my heart!"

The gong sounded loud in the vaulted hall, signal to dress for dinner. Maxime hurried off to change his clothes, and to give orders about his departure. A carriage was to be ready at

ten to take him to the station. The omnibus train left St. Vallier le Roi at twenty minutes past eleven, reached Dijon in time for the Rapide, and he would be in Paris in the early morning, with two or three hours to waste before he could hope to be admitted to the great Bianchon's consulting-room.

He was full of talk and laughter at the dinner-table that evening, in the small, snug circle of seven, with the exaggerated vivacity of a man who is trying to hide a canker in his heart. Vivien, too, was unusually gay: told his best stories, flashed his brightest repartees, a shade more recklessly than usual; and it may be that if Maxime de St. Vallier had not been preoccupied with his own gloomy thoughts he might have taken objection to some of the novelist's sallies. As it was he talked and rattled on, scarce hearing, certainly not heeding what was said by others, and hardly knowing what he said himself. In this feverish state he sat over the coffee and liqueurs till the butler announced the carriage that was to take him to the station. His servant and his valise were ready.

He took a hasty farewell of wife and friends, and was gone.

Dr. Bianchon received M. de St. Vallier before any other patient, although even at nine o'clock the great man's waiting-room was crowded. He had met his patient often in society, and received him as a friend.

"My dear St. Vallier, I have to congratulate you upon the improvement in your appearance. You look ten years younger since you were last in this room. In what Medea's cauldron have you been stewing?"

"My only Medea is my wife. My only medicine has been a year and a half of supreme happiness!"

"Ah, that is a kind of physic we often prescribe; but there are no chemists who make it up. And so you have come to tell me how well you are, and to get a little friendly advice that will enable you to become a centenarian," concluded Bianchon laughingly.

A consulting physician has so often occasion to look grave that he gladly snatches any excuse for being cheerful.

"I have come to ask you to make a thorough examination, and to find out if there is any hidden mischief in my constitution."

"Do you suspect anything?" asked the doctor, with his keen look—a look which suggested that for him the outward semblance of a man, coat and waistcoat included, was but a glass case through which he saw the inner machinery.

"No; I never felt better in my life."

"And you deliver yourself over of your own accord to the stethoscope and the sphygmometer! Prudent man. Kindly take off your coat and waistcoat."

Dr. Bianchon made a most studious examination of his patient, sounded, rapped, and listened, and then with a smile gave him a clean bill of health.

"Your pulse is capital, so we won't trouble the sphygmometer, which I find very useful with my alcoholic patients," said the doctor. "I told you when you were here last that there was nothing organically wrong. I can tell you now, in all good faith, that you are as sound within as you are well-looking without—no whited sepulchre

here, mon ami," with a friendly tap on the patient's chest.

"And there is no fear of my dying suddenly, within the next three or four days?"

"Not unless you get yourself under the wheels of an omnibus, or by the side of some clever friend who will scramble through a hedge with the muzzle of his gun pointed at your ribs. Death by internal disease you have no need to fear. Heart and lungs are as sound as a bell."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Maxime, fervently.

"What put these fears into your head? You must have felt nervous about yourself, or you would hardly have come all the way from your country place to see me."

"A foolish fancy. I am too happy in my surroundings not to fear. Good-bye; come and see me at St. Vallier if ever you can find time."

"That is just the thing I never can find; but I should like to spend a couple of days at your château when all Paris is out of town. Unfortunately, when all Paris is away, there are generally some very interesting cases at the

hospitals; and I take that opportunity to go on with my education."

Maxime and his wife possessed a pied-à-terre in the Rue de Varennes. It had been Lucie's house during her widowhood—a dainty little house *entre cour et jardin*—and here a couple of old servants kept all things in order while their master and mistress were in the country. Maxime had sent his servant on before him, and found a comfortable breakfast, neatly set out in the well-furnished library, which his wife had given him as his own den.

Small as the house was, and although all things in it were in perfect order, the rooms had an aspect which weighed upon Maxime's spirits. There was an atmosphere of emptiness and desolation. He was glad to put on his hat, and go out and wander aimlessly about Paris, finding his way to the Champs Elysées, and the Bois, counting the hours till the eight o'clock Rapide would take him southward.

In spite of the physician's positive assurance he was not altogether at ease. He could not feel as calm and hopeful as he should have done, under the circumstances. That vision of his old

friend pointing to the setting sun, and looking at him with solemn prophetic eyes, was with him wherever he went, came between him and every cheerful thought. His mind travelled back to those old days, under the shadow of St. Sulpice, fifteen years ago, when he and that dead friend had eaten the *vache enragée* together, and when in the midst of their struggles they had been hopeful and gay. Then had come literary successes —for him who was dead, the poet's laurel wreath, that withered all too soon, and left nothing behind it but the absinthe-madness, and a premature grave in Père la Chaise.

He had engaged places in the sleeping-car for himself and his valet. He was at the terminus half an hour before the train started, tired out with his rambles about Paris, and with the wakeful night in the express; so he took off coat and boots, and laid himself down under a fur rug which his servant arranged for him, and was soon asleep.

He must have slept some hours, for it was the voice of the porters shouting "Tonnerre!" that awoke him, and most of the travellers were getting out for supper. He did not care to eat or drink

—felt weary in limbs and head, and composed himself to sleep again. This time sleep did not answer to his call. Two men in berths near his were gossiping in a subdued murmur, which was more exasperating to St. Vallier's nerves than the loudest talking might have been.

"Know him?" said one of the speakers, "I should think I did know him—much better than he knows the women he pretends to analyze in those sickly novels of his. I tell you he is a lump of vanities—thinks himself irresistible—thinks that where he is concerned there is no such thing as virtue or honour in woman. A woman may have resisted every other tempter; but when he comes, he comes like Cæsar, to see and to conquer."

"I don't believe he will succeed with Madame de St. Vallier, irresistible as he may consider himself," said the other man.

"Do you know the lady?"

"I knew her when she was Madame Charles Colnet, and knew her to be a perfect wife; and yet I believe she was married to Colnet by her parents, when she was very young. He was hardly the kind of man a beautiful girl would

have chosen for herself—a rough diamond, *ce cher Colnet*—but she never allowed society to see that he was not the first man in the universe for her; and if this fellow, Vivien, brags of her favours, he must be an arrant scoundrel."

"He does not actually claim to be favoured; but he declares that he will be. You know his device: 'If not to-day, to-morrow.' I saw a letter he wrote to Julot, of the Sancho Panza, in which he vapoured as if to-morrow were near at hand."

They talked of other things, and by-and-by the murmuring ceased; but St. Vallier lay broad awake till the train steamed into Dijon, and he counted every minute that must pass before the tardy morning train would take him back, stopping at three village stations on the way, to St. Vallier le Roi.

His wife was at the station to meet him with a coupé and pair, more fur rugs, and a bouillotte.

She was there to meet him, radiant, loving; yet his soul sickened at the thought that her fondness might be a disguise to hide a heart that was already faithless. Yet no; he would not doubt her purity, even though the tainted

breath of the seducer had passed across her name.

"Is Vivien still at the château?" he asked carelessly, as they drove away from the station.

He had lost so much time on the way with that accursed omnibus train that it was already daylight, and he could see his wife's face darken suddenly at the sound of the novelist's name, and he felt the arm within his own tremble slightly.

"Yes; but he leaves this evening, by the same train by which you travelled."

"That is rather sudden, isn't it? He talked of staying as long as we would have him, in order that he might finish his novel in the quiet of the country."

"He may have found that his novel made very little progress, and that the air of St. Vallier was not conducive to literary work."

"Lucie! I believe that man has been guilty of some impertinence to you."

"Not the least in the world," his wife answered, with a little laugh, which was meant to be reassuring; "only he has somewhat outstayed his welcome. Laure and I are of the same

opinion in being tired of his company, and we ventured to let him perceive our sentiments—of course in the politest way—during your absence. Literary men are sensitive, and he was quick to understand the situation, and devise a sudden necessity to be in Paris."

"God bless you, my dearest!" cried Maxime, clasping his wife to his heart. "If Eve had been like you, the serpent would have crawled out of Eden baffled and humiliated."

"Dear Maxime, I really don't know what you are thinking about," his wife said gaily. "The whole business was as simple as *bon jour;* and I hope you will be especially polite to M. Vivien on the last day of his visit."

Maxime had not the slightest doubt that Hector Vivien had taken advantage of the husband's absence to declare himself to the wife, and that he had been repulsed with the fearless scorn of unassailable purity. He took an opportunity to question Laure Evremonde in the course of the day, and though she would tell him very little, her admissions, and even her reservations, confirmed him in his belief.

Vivien and his host did not meet till dinner-time. The novelist was in his room all day, busy packing, and arranging his papers. He travelled without a valet, and refused all offers of assistance from St. Vallier's household. Consumed with rage and agitation, he felt that he could not trust himself in the society of another man's servant. His irritation might break out at any moment and wreak itself upon some rustic wretch who had only offended by sheer stupidity.

Yes, he had wooed his friend's wife. He had found his opportunity in the afternoon solitude of the pleasaunce, screened from the windows of the château by ten-foot hedges of ilex and yew, as secure from observation as in a forest labyrinth. He had brought to bear all those arts and fascinations which he had always found irresistible with duchesses—in his novels—and occasionally triumphant with middle-class matrons in actual life; and his reward had been the scorn of scorn: such scorn as a pure-minded woman who loves her husband must needs feel at the folly of any man who dares to suppose that he can supersede that husband in her affections.

The dinner-table was not so gay as it had been on many another evening. Vivien talked as much as usual; but an angry light in his eyes, and a keener cynicism in his conversation, indicated latent irritation.

Maxime, who had been hysterically vivacious on the evening before his journey to Paris, was now grave and watchful. He and Tolpâche had talked together for half an hour before dinner, walking up and down the terrace on the edge of the moat, in the wintry darkness; and Tolpâche, like his host, was silent and *aux aguets*.

The dinner was long, and the carriage was announced while the men were still lingering over coffee and cigarettes. Madame de St. Vallier and her friends had retired to the music-room, whence came the sound of lightest opera-bouffe melodies played by Madame Evremonde, who was passionately fond of the music that lives for a Parisian season, to be as completely forgotten afterwards as the butterflies of last summer.

Vivien began his adieux with a cordial round of hand-shaking, taking the men at random as they happened to be standing. His host was

the last to whom he came, with sinister smile, and outstretched hand.

Maxime stood straight and stern in front of him, and did not take the hand.

"You know the old saying, Monsieur, 'Speed the parting guest'?" he said grimly. "I have the utmost pleasure in speeding your departure, which I believe was hastened by the particular request of my wife."

A quiver of surprise shook Vivien for a moment; but in the next he collected himself, and accepted the situation with all its consequences.

"I am leaving hurriedly, I admit," he said; "but although I am in some haste to leave this part of the world, I can spare you an hour to-morrow morning, in the wood on the other side of the railway. I shall spend to-night at the inn in your village, and shall be at your service at whatever hour may suit your convenience, and that of your friends."

"Tolpâche, you were prepared for this. Loisin, I know I can rely on you?" said Maxime, turning to his two most intimate friends. "For my own part I have only one desire to express. Let

our meeting be at sunset to-morrow: weapons as you please. That delay will give me time to arrange my affairs."

He turned on his heel, and went to the music-room, leaving Vivien to choose his own seconds, and settle details.

He felt, in his choice of the sunset hour, that he was obeying an old friend's summons, and accepting his fate.

The next day passed like a peaceful dream. Maxime and his wife were alone together for the greater part of their time, Lucie having excused herself from an excursion to a village race-course in order to be her husband's companion. No cloud upon his brow forewarned her of approaching doom. He wanted that day to be cloudless —that day which he told himself would be his last of love and of life. He parted with her at half-past three o'clock, straining her to his breast, with one long passionate kiss, as he bade her good-bye.

There was despair in that embrace; and for the first time since his return she was startled from her happy security.

"Why good-bye?" she asked. "How pale you are, Maxime! Is there anything wrong?"

"Wrong? No, dearest. I am only going as far as the village, to settle some farming business with my bailiff."

"You will be back to dinner?"

"I hope so."

When the sun dipped at the bottom of that wooded hollow, where Maxime had seen it sink three days before, the augury of the earnest face and the pointing hand had been fulfilled.

"IF THERE BE ANY OF YOU."

It was the Sunday after Ascension Day, a lovely day at the beginning of June, for Easter had been late that year, and the bloom of the horse-chestnuts, red and white, had faded before Holy Thursday. The old grey Gothic church had a slumberous look, and the masses of white azalea and the great arum lilies on the altar seemed to droop sleepily in the warm still air, almost as if, like many of the congregation, they were lulled to drowsiness by the mellow music of the Vicar's resonant voice.

His sermon to-day was a sermon of reproof, though he was not wont to speak hard words to his congregation, with whom he lived on the most affectionate terms. It was a village congregation, a parish in which there were three great houses and a scattered cottage population; a parish in which the middle classes were re-

presented only by the doctor and his wife; a purely rustic and agricultural parish in one of the gardens of England; a place to live and die in, if one wanted nothing better in this life than beautiful surroundings and a slumberous content. The Squire, Humphrey Arden, sitting nursing his knee, and reflectively contemplative of a Sunday boot, in the big, cloth-lined pew, desired nothing higher or nobler or more spirit-stirring than the life he led at Inglethorpe; nor did the retired cavalry officer who had inherited one of the three family seats, and who hunted four days a week from September to April, and thought himself in Paradise; nor did Mr. and Mrs. Montgomery Smith, who were spending the money made on a sheep-farm in the wilds of Queensland, and who thought themselves the greatest people in the neighbourhood.

The Vicar went on reasoning with his flock, and most of his flock heard him somewhat drowsily, and yet perhaps a little ashamed.

He was reproving them for their backwardness in attendance at the sacred table. He had been grieved and shocked by the small number of communicants on Thursday. He enlarged upon

that dull listlessness of spirit which makes religious duty a trouble, all serious thought a something to be put off from day to day, until the soul sinks into the great dismal swamp of indifference to spiritual things. He glanced at every reason for the shortcoming of his flock; and lastly he urged the familiar appeal, "If there be any of you whose unquiet conscience needs to be set at rest, let him come to me for help and counsel."

It did not seem as if in that rustic fold, where the daily lives of the flock passed in a tranquil monotony, and where no act of any member of the fold was hidden from the shepherd's eye, it did not seem as if any one's conscience could be weighed down by hidden sin of act or thought There were no opportunities for wrong-doing. It was scarcely a merit to be virtuous at Inglethorpe. The Vicar expected no response to this last appeal; but it was his duty to offer the suggestion, and he offered it.

There was one listener whose eyes were lifted to the pulpit with a grave earnestness, and that listener was Squire Arden's wife, a woman of exemplary charity. She was one of the back-

sliders. She had been a defaulter on Ascension Thursday, and on many a saint's day during the ecclesiastical year. The Vicar remembered with horror that she had not received the Sacrament from his hands since All Saints' Day. He could but hope she had been more mindful of her duties during her occasional absences from home. She looked up at him now, while her fine-looking, broad-shouldered husband slumbered peacefully by her side—looked up in grave attentiveness, but with no touch of resentment. If his expostulations were intended mainly for her she knew that the reproof was well deserved, and she was not angry with an old friend for being plain-spoken.

She was a beautiful woman, tall and fair, with features of classical regularity, and large violet eyes under strongly marked brows. She had been one of the beauties of the year in which she made her *début;* but she married in that year, before she was nineteen, and her life had been spent for the most part at Inglethorpe. Therefore the world had heard very little about her.

The Squire was handsome enough to be worthy

of so fair a bride. Every one who knew them admired them as a model couple. If the landed gentry of England were mainly composed of such people as these two, Radicalism would have no basis. The Squire's cottages were ideal dwellings; the Squire's allotment gardens and the Squire's wages were on the most liberal scale.

There were daily matins at Inglethorpe, albeit the sparse attendance at that function would have discouraged a less earnest worker than the Vicar. The Squire's house was a mile from the church, but the Squire's wife was always in her pew at eight o'clock, sometimes with her two lovely little girls and their governess, sometimes alone. The Squire considered Sunday a day set apart for church-going, and was seldom to be seen in church on a week-day.

On the Monday after that sermon of reproof, Mrs. Arden appeared in her place alone. The choir, the school-children, and a sprinkling of old women made up the rest of the congregation. While the Vicar was taking off his surplice in the vestry he was startled by a tap at the door,

and still more startled when Mrs. Arden appeared in answer to his prompt "Come in!"

Yes, it was the Squire's wife, very pale, and looking at him earnestly with those beautiful violet eyes—Irish eyes some people called them—so large and lustrous under their long, dark lashes.

"I want to talk with you, Mr. Eustace," she said, looking round to see if he were quite alone.

"I am altogether at your service, my dear Mrs. Arden. Pray sit down."

He drew a chair forward for her, and seated himself opposite to her. The little vestry had that cold and vault-like air common to most rural vestries. There was one small, latticed window near the ceiling, through which one caught a glimpse of green leaves and summer sky, and through which one heard the thrushes in a neighbouring garden.

"It is about your sermon yesterday. You meant it partly for me, did you not?"

"I confess that you were in my thoughts. I have been deeply grieved at your persistent absence from Holy Communion."

"I have come to you to confess the truth, to show you that it is right for me to stop away, that I am not fit to approach the altar."

The Vicar shook his head mournfully, and smiled at her with a gentle, soothing air, as if she had been a child.

"My dear Mrs. Arden, I can readily understand that a woman of your cultivated mind might be led away by some of those false lights which beguile the intellect and blight the soul. A great wave of infidelity is passing over Europe. Happy are those steadfast Christians who are not carried away by it. Tell me your doubts, my dear friend, and when and how they arose. Tell me the source of the poison, and be it for me to suggest the antidote. Is it Darwinism that has——?"

"No, no!" she interrupted impatiently. "It is nothing of that kind. I am not an infidel. I have no doubts. I absent myself from the Holy Communion because I am wicked, desperately wicked!"

The Vicar turned ghastly pale, and stared at her in mute horror. Good heavens! could it be that this lovely woman, this pink and pattern of

wives and mothers, was——? He had read a good many French novels in his college days, when novels were all the more alluring to him because he ought to have been reading other books. He remembered that in those romances every seemingly pure and perfect woman was rotten at the core. It was only a question of time when that rottenness developed itself. Some were sinners in the first chapter; some held out till nearly the end of the book; but virtue unassailable and steadfast he had never discovered inside a yellow paper cover from Lévy or Dentu. Could it be that Englishwomen in real life were of the same pattern, and that this woman was a false wife, and honest Humphrey Arden a dishonoured husband? He would not believe it. He hoped rather that she had gone out of her mind.

"I cannot think that you have erred beyond forgiveness," he murmured feebly.

"Yes, I have erred—I go on erring every day. I am a wicked wife to a good husband."

"In what way wicked?" faltered the Vicar, dreading the answer.

"I hate my husband."

This was a shock, though not exactly the

kind of shock Mr. Eustace expected. That was coming presently, no doubt.

"That is very terrible," he said, "for I fear that you would hardly hate your husband—especially so good a husband—if you were not in love with some one else."

"Mr. Eustace!" She gave him a withering look, which made him ashamed of his suggestion. "I never loved but one man in my life."

"And he was——"

"My husband. He was my first love, and he will be my last."

"Forgive me if I can't quite follow your meaning. You said just now——"

"I say that the love is all gone—gone as if it had never been—and dislike has grown up in its place. I am weary of him to desperation; weary of his commonplace talk, reiterating the same twaddling sentences; weary of his commonplace thoughts, never travelling beyond his cornfields and his cattle, his horses and dogs. Oh! the tedium of it, the monotony of it! the long summer days that are all alike; the long winter nights when we play whist, and this neighbour or that neighbour dines with us, and

my husband talks of his last new horse or of his old port. It is all misery to me. The very sound of his voice in the hall and corridors jars upon my nerves. We have not one thought or hope or pleasure in common. I loved him years ago because he was frank and manly and handsome, and because he loved me. I gave my whole heart to him without question or thought of the future. I knew that I loved him, and that seemed enough. And for the first two or three years love was enough. I was happy in being so truly loved. I never found out the blank in our lives, the disunion in our union. Then by degrees I grew tired—oh, so tired of him—with a dead, dull feeling as if my heart had left off beating. Then after weariness came positive dislike, and then—I have wished that he were dead. Yes, I have wished that good, true, honest man were dead, out of this world, and that I were free to live my own life. That is a sin, is it not?"

"Yes, it is a sin, doubtless—a sinful thought; but I cannot think that such a thought has ever taken any serious hold of your mind. It was but a wandering fancy—a snare of Satan."

"A snare of Satan, perhaps; but if it is the devil who put this evil thought into my mind, he has got a firm hold of me. It is not a sin of to-day or yesterday. The feeling has been growing and gathering strength for years—a feeling of absolute aversion. Think of it, Mr. Eustace; think what a wicked thing it is to sit by my husband's side, to eat and drink with him, and in secret to wish that he were dead and I released from my bondage. I may do my duty as a wife—I will do it till the end of my days; but do you think I am a woman to kneel at yonder altar, to be accepted of Him, whose gospel is epitomized in three words, 'Love one another'?"

"It is deeply sad," murmured the priest. "To deny you the comfort of the Holy Sacrament is to give strength to Satan. I would rather say to you, bring your sinful secret to the altar, lay your evil thoughts where all spiritual burdens should be laid, and hope for pardon and cure. Who knows? Some new light may come into your darkened soul. Love may be rekindled in your heart."

"Never!" cried the wife. "Love is dead. Love is changed to weariness and disgust. Love

sickened when I found out the vacant mind behind that frank, good face. Yes, he is good. I have no word to say against him—but it is a brainless goodness. God help me, I believe I could love him better if he were a clever scoundrel."

The Vicar sighed. His experience had shown him that scoundrels get the lion's share of domestic love. Some of the worst men he had known had been idolized by their wives.

"Come to the early celebration next Sunday morning," he said, "and leave your sorrow in the hands of God. We have all our burdens. Perhaps it is because your life has been exempt from all sordid cares, and because, thanks to the splendid health of your two dear little girls, you have been exceptionally free from the sorrows and anxieties which some mothers have to suffer—that this terrible temptation, the temptation to revolt against your natural friend and protector—has assailed you. Do not, my dear lady, give up the battle as lost. Fortify your heart with the strength of religious faith, look above for courage and for hope. Believe me, your prayers will be answered."

"I have prayed, and in vain," she said despondently.

"You have kept aloof from the Holy Sacrament; you have hardened your heart against your God."

"It was because I thought myself too vile a sinner."

"You are a penitent sinner, that is enough."

A year later, and Mrs. Arden and the priest were seated in the same vestry, and she was pouring out her heart's inmost secrets to him, as freely as before, tears streaming down her pale cheeks from eyes that had been tearless when she told him her trouble last year. And yet to-day it was not a burden of sorrow which she laid before the good priest, but a story of gladness and thanksgiving. In the early spring-tide of this year a great horror had come over her life. Her two little girls had been smitten with fever, and had lain at death's door. For one terrible fortnight she and her husband had lived in fear and trembling lest the destroyer should make their home desolate. In both cases the medical man had feared a fatal issue; but the

pestilence had passed by and left the mother rejoicing.

"I can never tell you how good he was to me in that dreadful time," said Mrs. Arden, speaking of her husband. "I can never be grateful enough to him, or to God for giving me so good a man. His courage, his resolution, his love, his tenderness and pity for me! Oh, how undeserved, how undeserved, that tenderness was! I told you he was a good man, Vicar, in this room a year ago."

The Vicar bent his head with a grave smile.

"But I did not know half his goodness till I saw him by his children's side in the dead of the night, when we thought we should lose them both."

She broke down here with a stifled sob, and had some difficulty in conquering her emotion.

"And you no longer hate him?" asked the Vicar, quietly.

"Hate him! I detest myself for my wicked folly in ever thinking slightingly about the best of men."

"And you find, after all, that you have some thoughts, some hopes, some pleasures, in common?" questioned the Vicar, remembering her very words in that vestry.

"We have our children in common. That is enough."

'THE ISLAND OF OLD FACES.'

"The mourned, the loved, the lost,
Too many, yet how few!"

I HAVE always thought that there is something mystic and unearthly in the light of a summer dawn—that early light of midsummer, that mysterious day within the night which lights the world while most of its inhabitants are sleeping—a glory and a loveliness of which so few of us are aware; a banquet of colour spread by Nature's lavish hand, while her ungrateful children lie unconscious, or wander in the dark labyrinths of dreamland. It is sad to think how many troubled sleepers lie bound in the thrall of horrible dreams while the meadow-dews sparkle under heaven's canopy of opal and rose, and every forest glade and every streamlet is lighted with the magic of sunrise.

Never had I more keenly felt the beauty of

those soft gradations from darkness to dawn—the imperceptibleness of the change which makes the new day always something of a surprise—than I felt it as I stood on the deck of the *Zouave*, waiting while a couple of sailors lowered the dinghy that was to carry me to a tiny island which the dawn had shown me—a cluster of cocoa palms lying on the placid breast of the sea, a tuft of verdure in mid-ocean. It seemed no more than that.

Three months before that summer dawn my doctor had told me that I was overworked, and that my nerves were in a very bad state; so, as I really felt somewhat shaken, I placed myself in the hands of my nearest friend, and let him do what he liked with me.

What my friend liked was to hire a yacht that was to cost me four hundred pounds a month, to engage an intelligent young navy surgeon as my *companion de voyage* and ship doctor, in the event of any one on board wanting medical aid, and to send me off to the South Seas for a half-year's holiday. I was to do nothing and to think of nothing, to

forget even that I had lately engaged myself to a beautiful and high-born lady, who had, I believe, fallen in love with my celebrity in the law courts rather than with my very self. Years and years ago some one had loved me—this very me—but when a man has come within measurable distance of the woolsack, he can hardly hope for that kind of love.

The *Zouave* was lying at anchor, and my clever young medico was fast asleep in his berth when I stepped lightly from the accommodation ladder to the dinghy, and bade the men row me as fast as their oars could go, to yonder tufted islet. Did they know the name of it?

No; as far as they knew it had no name. It was a mere speck on the chart, an uninhabited island.

The dinghy crept into a tiny cove under the shadow of an hibiscus tree, whose gold and orange flowers dropped on the luminous green water. I landed, and sent the men back to the yacht.

"You can return for me in the afternoon."

"At what o'clock, sir?"

"Say three o'clock, and at this place."

I walked away quickly, leaving the man saying something that was unheard by me.

Oh, the loveliness of that wooded islet in the pearly light and in the depth of shadow, where the tree-ferns spread and mingled their fans and made a canopy above my head, a leafy roof of texture so light that it trembled with every breath of the summer wind, letting in sudden arrowy flashes of morning sunshine and then growing dark again in a moment—a perpetual flicker of lights that came and went, amidst the warm green darkness!

The mosses beneath my feet were so thick and soft that earth seemed to lose its common substance, and to have all the spring and buoyancy of water. The air was filled with the scent of irises, jasmines, and lemon-grass that here grew wild; and the blossoms that leapt from tree to tree, that flashed out in gleams of vivid scarlet, orange, azure, purple, rose, with every flash of sunlight, or deepened into a dark glow of colour with every interval of shadow—how shall poor words of mine depict that splendid loveliness of flowers that were like living creatures, and seemed to flit past me on

translucent wings, and flowers that sparkled like jewels and seemed to irradiate light? Among some of that brilliant bloom I saw clusters of purple berries. I tasted some of them, very cautiously, lest they should be poisonous; but they had only a sweet insipid taste that could belong to no deadly juices, and I ate a handful of them slowly as I strolled along.

I thought the island uninhabited, when suddenly a form that I knew sprang into the emerald vista, and drawing nearer each other, Lionel Haverfield and I met face to face, after many years of severance.

Until this moment I had believed him dead. We clasped hands, and he turned and walked beside me.

"My dear old friend, is it really you?"

"Yes, dear Hal."

That was all we said to each other just at first. There was little need of speech between friends who were in such perfect sympathy as Lionel and I. We had been together at a famous public school, at Oxford, and then again in London, at the beginning of the great life-struggle, the young man's fight for fame and

fortune. We had been such close friends, had so thoroughly understood each other. And I had thought him dead. Was it strange that tears rushed to my eyes and blinded me for a moment or two, or that I flung my arm about his neck almost as a woman might have done?

"Lionel, I am so glad, so glad my fancy brought me here. I knew nothing of this island till I saw a tuft of palms on the horizon in the dim early light, and I had the boat off the davits and was on my way here, in a wild haste, to see what it was like. I am so glad."

"And so am I glad, Hal; for my own sake, very glad."

"For your own sake, and for my sake. Surely you don't grudge me my happiness?"

"No, no, no. It is your happiness I am considering when I say I am not wholly glad."

"But I am utterly happy in finding you. What need a man be more than happy?"

"It is of by-and-by I am thinking. When you go back to the world, and may regret——"

"Regret having seen you! Why Lionel, what a thought! Regret! Why, there is hardly anything in the world that could make me gladder

than to see your dear old face. Upon my soul, Lionel, I believed you were dead."

He looked at me gravely, but made no answer. Then, after a pause, he said, "The world has used you well, I dare say, and you love the world."

"Oh, I have what you called succeeded. I put on the pace. Ten years of my life, from twenty-five to thirty-five, were years of unmitigated drudgery—and then the reward came in a day, and after labouring in the trough of the sea, I found myself on the crest of the wave, floating along in the sunshine without a single stroke of my own, just tossed like a cork from success to success. But, in spite of it all, I am very tired, and this sleepy hollow of yours is ever so much better than the strife and babble of the law courts, or the row and riot of the bear-pit at Westminster. I should like to stay here with you for ever, on an island which reminds me of the charmed repose that Odysseus and his companions found in the Western sea—an island where it seems always—no, not afternoon, but morning; the still freshness of the new-born day. Whatever I may have done, you have chosen the better part—rest, and for ever rest; no work, no

care, only the soft sad lullaby of the sea, and the blue sky, and

> 'Flowerets of a thousand hues . . .
> . . . the quaint enamell'd eyes,
> That on the green turf suck the honied showers.'"

I quoted Lycidas, remembering how he loved the lines, in those old days when he was a poet, and when we all thought he ought to have won the Newdigate.

"You cannot stay here," he said, in that serious voice which was so unlike the voice of his youth. "The world calls you; there are claims you cannot deny. You must live out your life."

"Yes, there are claims," I admitted, almost reluctantly.

And then I told him of my recent betrothal to a young and beautiful woman—told him as unreservedly as I used to tell him all my thoughts and feelings, hopes and resolutions, when we were young.

When we were young, did I say? Why, he was young still. I had aged in the strife and turmoil of the great race for wealth and fame, but he, in this island of rest, showed no trace of the

passing years. There was only one thoughtful line upon the broad fair brow, the line I remembered when he was a student of the Inner Temple twenty years ago. The face was the face that had looked at me so kindly in the summer dusk the night I started for Scotland. And when I came back from my holiday, somebody told me he was dead. Surely I had been taught to think him dead! I looked back, trying to remember—and I could recall a visit to his empty rooms, and the figure of his sister passing me in the street, six months afterwards, in deep mourning. I had only seen her once before, in the Commemoration week, in my second year at Balliol, and I made no attempt to recall myself to her. She flitted by me, and vanished like a shadow in the busy London street.

I remembered this dimly now, with a vague wonder that he should be here, bright and young, he whom I had mourned for among the dead.

He led me into the heart of the island, a wooded valley, through which there wound a stream of rushing waters, deep and dark in mid-channel, where the strong current swept towards

the sea, but with many a reedy inlet and pool, where water-lilies, white and golden, lifted their shallow cups from the level expanse of broad leaves, and where the still water only showed here and there in patches of emerald light amidst the darker green of leaf and flower.

We sat in the shade of a cluster of cocoanut palms, with one of those shallow pools stretching at our feet, between the low grassy bank and the rush of the stream; a level garden of water-lilies, over which birds and butterflies hovered and flitted, creatures of tropical splendour that flashed and sparkled in the light, too swift, too brilliant for human eye to follow them.

We talked of the past, of days that had been happy and gay enough while we lived them, and which when looking back to them seemed a period of unalloyed bliss. We recalled only the brightest hours—we remembered nothing that had been distasteful. Lionel's soft low laugh sounded in the balmy stillness as I lay stretched indolently on the grass at his feet, looking up at the milky blueness of the tropical sky, basking in the slumberous warmth of the tropical noontide.

Presently—I know not how it came there—*her* face was looking down upon me. Lucy Marsden's face—my love, my betrothed of five and twenty years ago. Ah, what a lovely face it was!—features delicately chiselled, complexion of an almost alabaster fairness touched with hectic bloom upon the somewhat wasted cheek, a flush that added depth and brilliancy to the large violet eyes. I remembered how those pathetic eyes had grown brighter and larger day by day, and how I had noted that increasing brightness with an unspeakable terror, and then one dreary November her people took her away to Mentone, and I was told to stay in London, and work and hope, and look forward to her return with the March daffodils; and then—and then—— Well, it was all a dark dream—that which followed upon our sorrowful parting. The letters, the telegrams, for which I sat and waited in my dismal Temple Chambers, pretending to read law, with my thoughts far away, following the progress of Lucy's malady. It was only a dreadful dream, which I recalled shudderingly to-day, as our hands clasped again and her eyes looked down at me.

I sprang to my feet, and we sauntered side by side under the palm trees, and talked and were happy; I with a quiet gladness which asked no questions; she, sweetly, gravely kind; changed greatly, and yet the same. Gentle as she had ever been, humble as a child in her modest estimate of her own gifts of mind and person, I felt to-day an overmastering awe in her presence. I adored as a good Catholic adores a saint, but hardly dared to love her with the warm glow of human love—or to question—or to talk lightly of past and future. She was with me, and that was enough.

My mind was not troubled about my betrothed of the later time, the girl I was to marry early in the coming year, and who was said to have distinguished me by her regard. She belonged to that far-off world of whose existence I was scarcely conscious all through that golden day, while those living flashes of light and colour flitted over the broad white chalices, and the level leaves rose and fell with the throb of the water, moved with slow swaying motion by that hurrying tide in the middle of the stream, where a fleet of hibiscus blossoms marked the

swiftness of the current as it moved towards the sea.

How could I remember the outside world, with its grovelling desires, its base ambitions, self-consciousness, self-love, envy, hatred, and malice, its sordid fight for pounds, shillings, and pence! If I thought of it for a moment in this haven of calm delight, it was only to think with loathing, to hate myself for the base desires whose gratification I had called happiness —the gold fever—the hunger for lands and houses, and empty honours, and petty distinctions, the relentless striving for success, the struggle to be just a little higher placed than this man or that man.

Here I was young again, and all my thoughts had the freshness of young thoughts, before the mind is hardened and the fancy staled by friction with the world of middle age; the cold, calculating period of man's existence, the age in which he thinks he can do without affection if he can but achieve success.

My thoughts were the thoughts of youth; and every picture of those vanished years returned in vivid colouring. I lived again in the un-

forgotten hours, clasped the unforgotten hands. All I have ever lost of nearest and dearest were gathered together in that nameless island; father, mother, the sister who vanished, ah, so inexplicably, out of the sunshine and the playtime, before I had quite learnt to speak, leaving only the memory of tearful faces and hushed voices in a darkened house. All were there—the familiar faces, the gentle hands, the low, sweet voices of the long ago.

And if I wondered it was only with a child's wonder—easily satisfied. And if I questioned the things I saw, I had my own answer ready for my own question.

I had always known that the black shadow of death which swallows up all we love best in the early years, is but a transient cloud. I had always known that somewhere, somehow, those we love are living yet, and we want but the clue to find them. And to me the clue had been given. That eager instinct which had urged me to come to this enchanting islet was the spirit of love leading me. So my question was answered as easily as it was asked. There is no death. I had always known that it must

be so. The God who made us in His own likeness will not obliterate the image He has made.

And so I gave myself up to the unclouded happiness of that golden day. The bright summer noontide melted into the mellow light of summer afternoon. My first day in this happy spot had long passed its meridian.

"And in the all-golden afternoon A friend, or happy sister, sung——," I quoted, from that book which had been as a second gospel for Lucy and me—my first gift to her, the gift of small means and large heart. To my later love I gave diamonds of the first water, but my heart did not go with them as unquestioningly as it went with the little green cloth book.

Alas! The day came, too soon, when I could not read a page of that long lament without blinding tears, when it seemed almost as if I myself had written that elegy for her whom no ship brought home, whose bed of rest had been made on a hill by the historic sea.

"Sing to me, Lucy!" I pleaded; "one of the old favourites—'I arise from dreams of thee.'"

She would not sing; but we talked of the old time—the days before they took her to Mentone.

Something I said of never leaving her again. I had found my anchorage at last, I told her. I renounced ambition—all that the outside world could give. I would have no world beyond this coral reef with its mantle of ferns and flowers, its populace of birds and butterflies, and the friends of other days.

Those others came and went as the day wore on. Sometimes one, sometimes another, was at our side; but Lucy was there always, constant and true as she had been from the hour her faltering lips first confessed her love—blessed, unforgettable hour!—in a Warwickshire garden, within sound of the classic Avon. As she had been on that day in the gardens of her father's rectory, so she was to-day in the shadow of the tufted palms, in the paradise of winged creatures—just as lovely, as guileless, and as young.

But when I talked of never leaving her, she shook her head gravely, and laid her fingers lightly on my lips.

"Dear love, this is no life for you!" she said

seriously; "you will have to go back to the world."

"Never, Lucy! This shall be my world."

"It cannot be. You have seen us and lived with us for one golden day; that is all. You will go back to the world, and—oh, my dear, my dear, I am so sorry for you!"

"Dearest, why sorry? I say again that nothing shall part us any more—nothing but death! Death, did I say? No, there is no such thing. We will never part. This island shall be our home for ever."

"Alas, that cannot be! It is your misfortune to have found us. You will go back, and you will never be happy again. That is the bitterness of it. You have drunk of the fountain of memory, the fatal fountain which makes all that is seem worthless compared with all that has been. The world will be barren and dull and empty; but you must go back to it. Oh, my dearest, yours is so hard a fate! To have seen us, and to remember the days of your youth, and never to know earthly happiness again!"

I would not believe her—would not believe in that stern "must" which she repeated with

sorrowful look and tone. My life was my own, to do what I liked with, I told her, and I meant to spend my life by her side.

And then we talked of lighter things—gaily recalling many a bygone jest, happy as the birds that shot with gleaming wing across the lustrous water. The tropical twilight came down upon us suddenly, like a dim grey veil, and my darling's voice fell on my ear as softly as the murmur of a far-off sea—and then all was blank.

It was daylight again when I awoke, again the cool pearly light of earliest morning. I sprang to my feet, fearing to find myself in some different place—to have been spirited back to the yacht during that long dreamless sleep.

No, I was on the island still. There were the sleeping water-lilies with their closed cups, and their broad leaves heaving faintly with the slow pulses of that quiet back-water; there was the ripple of the current yonder, where the river ran towards the sea; and now and again, as I looked and listened, came the call of some newly awakened bird; but human presence there was

none within my ken, as I stood by the lily pool looking about me. So I walked on hurriedly, searching for the friends of yesterday.

Through open glade and shadowy wood, by hill and hollow, over wide stretches of level greensward, through the moist hot tangle of tropical verdure, I wandered and searched, till the meridian sun made those open spaces intolerable, and till the fervour of my search had to yield to overmastering fatigue, and I sank down in the shadow of a great plane tree, tired to death, disappointed and almost despairing.

Where were they gone? Why had they left me? How cruel to abandon me thus—to hide themselves from me! It seemed to me that I had searched the island from shore to shore; but there were forest caves, perhaps—secret sanctuaries amidst the wild luxuriance of the wood—which I, as a stranger, must needs be slow to discover. In spite of my utter weariness I meant to continue my search as soon as I was able to walk again. In my present state of exhaustion I could hardly stand.

I lay stretched along the mossy ground at the foot of the tree, staring idly at a vista of light

and shadow, where clusters of scarlet lilies flamed like torches as they glanced here and there amid the foliage, shooting up towards the light. Nothing was changed in the aspect of external nature; and yet I felt that I was in another atmosphere, and the change in my own feelings between yesterday and to-day was a change from hope and gladness to dull despair.

Oh! the silence of all human voices after the familiar voices of yesterday—the sense of utter desolation that had grown and strengthened with every hour of that long weary morning, till now my heart sank within me under the icy sense of fear. I felt the child's fear, who sees itself deserted and solitary in a place where all things are strange—the fear of the unknown.

Voices—human voices—sounded faint in the distance, grew nearer, louder—near enough to be recognizable—before I could walk half a dozen yards to meet them.

Alas! not the dear voices of yesterday. Coarse common voices these—the strident hail of one of my sailors, and then a loud shrill cooey, piercing this tropical garden; familiar voices,

and welcome in my present humour; but bringing little beyond the promise of material comfort, rest for my aching bones, drink for my feverish lips.

The sailors who had brought me from the yacht yesterday came running towards me as I faintly hailed them. They would never have heard that low cry, they told me afterwards. It was the sight of my white clothes gleaming in the sun that guided them to me from the other end of a long glade. They had been looking for me since daylight, having come back to the island in the late evening and camped there, after an ineffectual search for me.

"We waited in the dinghy, in the creek where we landed you, from three o'clock till dark," the mate explained. "Then, as you didn't turn up, we went back to the yacht for further orders, and the sailing master sent us back to the island with provisions for the night, and the doctor he came with us, and we've been roaming about all the blessed morning on the look out for you!"

My young friend and medical adviser came up while the man was talking, and was full of concern about me in his easy pleasant manner,

which never made a trouble of anything. I had been more than thirty hours on the island, he said, without food or shelter. He was eager to get me back to the yacht, and in the mean time he wanted to ply me with brandy from a flask which he carried.

"Where are the people," I asked him—"the people who were with me all yesterday?"

"My dear sir, there are no people—the island is uninhabited."

I could not argue with him, or tell him of those whom I had seen and mingled with in that long golden day. I was heart-broken at the thought that I should see them no more, that my Lucy had been right, and I must go back to the world—whether I would or no. There are some things too sacred to be talked about except to one's nearest and dearest, and I could not tell this light-hearted young doctor that I had been among the faces of the past, and that the recollections of my youth had been brought nearer to me than the realities of the present.

So I just let them take me back to the yacht, and allowed myself to be nursed through a sharp

touch of fever; and I came slowly out of the cloudland of feverish fancies to remember those dear faces, and to know that they were the faces of those who had crossed the unknown river, and that for me on this hither side life held nothing worth caring about.

The first English ship that we spoke after my recovery carried home my letter of renunciation to the lady who was to have been my wife. I told her that quiet hours of meditation in the solitude of my long holiday had convinced me that any bond between beauty and youth, like hers, and a worn-out life like mine would be ill-advised, and must prove an unhappy union, for her at least, and that I therefore declined to take advantage of the girlish enthusiasm which had led her to mistake admiration for the famous advocate for love of the middle-aged man. My betrothed was prompt in sending her reply, which I found waiting for me three days ago at Aden. Only a packet of letters—my own to her—and a diamond half-hoop ring.

The atoms that were once those letters are floating somewhere in space, and the ring lies in a little silver tray on my dressing-table among

other unconsidered trumpery; and, in the oppressive heat of the Red Sea, I sit on deck under an awning and meditate on the life that awaits me in the country which I must needs call home.

Oh, how barren and dry-as-dust it all seems! The labour, the success, the troops of friends—the friends of middle-age—picked up in the dust and strife of the arena, too busy to care very much if I were to drop and die in the crowd, like a mustang, newly harnessed, and dragged off his feet in the wild rush of a stage-coach team on the Pampas. What, is the brute down again? Unrope him, and leave him for the crows and the kites; and on with the journey, lashing the rest of the team the harder to keep up the pace.

MY DREAM.

We were to be married in three weeks—an autumn wedding, amidst falling leaves and the ceaseless drip of soft October rain.

It had been a rainy year, a year of dull grey skies and frequent showers, and long days of rain which kept people close prisoners within four walls; but it had been the one golden summer of my life, and I looked back to it afterwards as a spirit in torment might look back upon a year in Paradise. I was seven and twenty years of age, and the man I had loved ever since I was sixteen had come home from the Punjab war. He had escaped out of battles which seem like the warfare of giants, as we read the history of them to day; and he had found out all at once, as it were by accident, that he had thought me a nice little girl eleven years ago, and that he loved me now. He had

been in love—madly, passionately in love—with a girl in India, his commanding officer's daughter; and she had jilted him, and married a rich civilian, with a bald head and an irascible temper, and my dearest one had worn the willow for three years and a half before he came home and proposed to poor little me.

I was inclined to be sorely jealous of the inconstant lady, and I fancied that the love he gave me could be only second-best—a rose with withered edges, a peach without the bloom—and I fear I tormented him with my suspicious questionings. But little by little that warm flame of love which breathed round me comforted my doubting heart; little by little I grew to believe that this new love was all in all.

He, Gilbert Strangford, was thirty-four, and I was twenty-seven—sober ages both, years at which we ought to have done with romance, perhaps—yet we were both as romantic as boy and girl lovers, and for both of us life was glorified with the mystic colouring of dreamland, and all things about and around us, except our love, seemed half unreal.

I was an orphan, well provided for, and with

aunts and uncles who had done much to fill the empty places in my life. Gilbert's father and mother were living, an ideal squire and squire's wife, delightfully old-fashioned in their habits and ideas, and deeply attached to the soil which had belonged to the Strangfords from the reign of King Charles the Martyr, and to the house in which many generations of Strangfords had been born. They had known me from my childhood, and they were fond of me, which made my cup of bliss all the sweeter.

I had spent the season with my aunt, Lady Chittenden, in Bruton Street, and I had been on a round of short visits to country houses in August and September—houses to which Gilbert had been invited sometimes for my sake, sometimes for his own. Life had been one perpetual holiday for both of us. My books, that daily tale of serious reading which I had accomplished ever since I was twenty, had been put aside; my work-basket had become a dusty tangle of silks and wools; my friends were all indignant at unanswered letters; my piano practice was a thing of the past; and I had discovered that it had never been worth while to cultivate my

insignificant faculty for art. In a word, I, who had hitherto been considered a rather remarkable example of order and industry, had become as idle as a butterfly in the sunshine.

My round of visits to old friends of my parents, and girl-friends of my own who had become matrons, was finished, and my last visit of all had begun. I was at Strangford Court, where I was to spend a fortnight, while my trousseau was being completed under the experienced and watchful eye of my aunt in Bruton Street. On the 20th day of October I was to transfer myself to Hilberry Manor, my uncle's place in Hampshire, the next county; and on the last day of the month Gilbert and I were to be married at Hilberry Church, a long narrow early Norman church on the edge of a wood, very dreary and dripping at that season, no doubt. But what would dismal weather matter to us, who were to follow the swifts and the swallows to bluer skies, above the deep dark blue of the Mediterranean? Our long winter honeymoon was to be spent in Southern France and Italy. We sat side by side, going over maps and guide-books, living in fond expecta-

tion the days that we were to live together in reality. I had travelled very little beyond the most conventional British watering-places, and Gilbert had only skimmed across Italy on his way from the East. The names of historical Italian cities—Pisa, Bologna, Verona—were as dream-like to him as they were to me.

Dream-like—all life was dream-like in that golden season; and after the dreamy days, the saunterings in garden or meadow, the morning rambles in woodland or on hill, the lazy afternoons upon the river, his sculls scarce moving in the rowlocks as we drifted with the tide: after the dreamy days came the dreams of night and slumber—dreams in which the image of my second self was always present in some form or other; sometimes in the wildest entanglement of events and circumstances, in the strangest combination of people and places—he ever with me in my dreams, I ever with him.

We used to tell each other laughingly of these wild adventures in the dim slumber-land, with their curious interweaving of the ridiculous and the sublime, the awful and the absurd. We were both interested in the psychology of

dreams, and read everything we could discover that had been written upon the subject. Those keen impressions, those vivid images, so strangely real for the moment, so wildly impossible when looked back upon by our waking minds, were a source of endless speculations and discussions.

On two or three occasions I had what I called an uncomfortable dream about my dear love—a dream which left me nervous and depressed, only to be reassured by his actual presence, the warm grasp of his strong hand, the cheery sound of his voice, his laughing assurance that he had not fallen from his horse, or been capsized in a friend's yacht, or suffered from any such misadventures as my dream-fancies had touched upon.

"You are a most assiduous dreamer, Bessie," he said, laughing at me. "You must dream a three-volume novel per night, I think. It would be strange if some of your dreams were not to come true. That perpetually revolving kaleidoscope of yours must develop an occasional hard fact."

"God forbid that any of my bad dreams should come true, Gilbert!"

"So say I; but I would have no objection to

one of your good ones turning up trumps. That dream you told me of the other day, for instance, in which Rothschild left me a million or so, and in which you and I began to build a malachite palace on the banks of the Neva."

How we laughed at those foolish fancies of sleep, and how lightly we passed over the gloomiest visions! The morning brought the glad reality of a life that seemed without a cloud, in whatever strange and shadowy places we might have wandered through the night.

The pheasant-shooting had begun when I arrived at the Court. Gilbert and his mother—my future mother—met me at the junction, and drove me to the old house which henceforward was to mean home for me as well as for the only son. His married sister, Lucy Rawdon, was in the portico, with her two small boys, as we drove up, and the little boys were very eager to make friends with me, and held up rosy lips to be kissed.

"Mother says you're to be our new aunt," the elder boy said as I kissed him.

Captain Rawdon was out with the shooters, and all the other men of the house-party were

engaged in the same manner. Strangford Court was famous for its pheasants, and I felt that my *fiancé* was making a great sacrifice in staying at home morning after morning, when his visitors all went tramping off in their shooting gear for a long day in the copses.

"It is a part of my apprenticeship," he said laughingly, when I apologized for my selfishness in absorbing him; "it is a condition of my servitude. Ten years hence, when we are old married people, I may turn sportsman again."

So we spent our days together at Strangford Court as we had done in other people's houses—wet days many of them, on which I used to sit in a deep bow-window in Mrs. Strangford's morning-room, pretending to work, while Gilbert read aloud, his mother busy about her own affairs, going in and out, and leaving us frequent opportunities for confidential talk about the near future.

He was to leave the army—that had been agreed between us when I accepted him as my husband. I loved him too well to endure the hazards of a soldier's life; and he had seen a

good deal of active service, and had more than one scar to tell of peril past and hair-breadth escapes. His father was old and infirm, and the heir was wanted at home to look after the estate. Mrs. Strangford was nearly twenty years younger than her husband, and her life for the last ten years had been one of dulness and self-sacrifice. Gilbert's marriage and establishment at the Court would be the beginning of a new existence for her; and I, who had never known a mother's love, was very delighted at the idea of being cherished and cared for by a mother-in-law.

How tenderly she welcomed me on that fateful visit—a tenderness that never failed me until her life's end!

The second week of my visit had begun, when there was great talk, at dinner, one evening, about a shooting tournament that was to begin next day in some ducal covers fifteen miles from Strangford—an annual business lasting two or three days—at which Gilbert had always assisted when he was at the Court. This year he was not going to the Castle, though the Duke's invitation for him and his house-party had come

in due course, with hospitable offers to put up a party of six at the Castle.

He had accepted the invitation to the shooting for his friends, and Captain Rawdon and the others were to start early next morning in a four-horse brake.

When we were in the drawing-room after dinner, I begged Gilbert to go with the others. I had heard him talk of the sport at Hainsleigh as one of his most enjoyable experiences, and at dinner there had been a good deal said about the men who were to be there—men who were distinguished in more than one walk of life, and whom I knew Gilbert would like to meet—his friends, some of them; others, men whom he admired for their intellect and their achievements.

"Don't stay away from such a brilliant party for my sake," I said.

"My dearest, do you think that men have much margin for being brilliant when they are bent on filling their bags. In a shooting-party the best shot is the best man."

"But the dinner afterwards."

"Delightful; and the smoke-room after that.

But a nice knight I should be if I could stay away for four and twenty hours from my liege lady. No, Bess, the Duke is a very good fellow, and a capital neighbour; but I have new duties, and home has new charms."

I was not so easily answered. I wanted to fight against my own selfishness, which would have kept him always at my side. I pleaded against myself, feeling all the time that I was making a stupendous sacrifice, and, as it were, forestalling my duty as a wife, which would be to make my pleasure subservient and secondary to his. In the end I conquered his reluctance, and he made up his mind to go in the brake with the others, and to take his portmanteau with him, in the event of being persuaded to stay the night.

"The party will have to be monstrously attractive if they are to keep me, Bess," he said; "for, be the men as brilliant as they may, there will be a magnet to draw me home against whose force I shall have the smallest power of resistance."

The house-party, strengthened by half a dozen or so of visitors from the neighbourhood,

was particularly merry that evening—merry to the verge of inanity, I thought, my own spirits being overshadowed by the forecast of the blank to-morrow, the first day for a long time that I should have to pass without my own true love.

"'What can I do to cheat the time away?'" I thought; and then I resolved to ask Mrs. Strangford to take me on a round of visits to the poorest among her cottagers—the people whom she was in the habit of helping—so that I might learn to know them, and to help them too, by-and-by, when I should take up my abode at the Court.

All things had been planned for that new life. The rooms my husband and I were to occupy had been duly fixed upon, and were to be improved and renovated during our long winter abroad. One wing of the Court had been given over to us for our private use, with ample room and verge enough for stateliest occupation; and I was to have my own garden, where I might make and meddle as I pleased, without fear of reproof from the mistress of the house, or the head gardener.

"I fear, before many years are over, I shall be only the dowager, Bessie," Mrs. Strangford said sadly, "and my poor old man's rooms yonder will be empty."

It was very late when we dispersed to our rooms that night, as generally happens in a country house when some members of the party have to rise at an abnormal hour next morning, and when officious friends have been obtrusively insistent about that fact from nine o'clock upwards. There is a spice of pig-headedness in humanity, perhaps—a tendency in most minds to go in the opposite direction to that in which other people try to drive them. I know it was long after midnight when a little flight of chamber candlesticks went fluttering up the broad oak staircase and through the dusky corridors, with more noise of talk and laughter than becomes a sober house-party.

Great God! how happy I was that night, despite the shadow of to-morrow's parting, as we two pressed hands, and bade each other good night, and good-bye.

"I shall come home to-morrow evening, if I

can, Bess," he said; "though I do take a portmanteau."

* * * * *

Oh! the awful distinctness of that dream—clear and sternly cut against the dark of dreamland. I was standing at the corner of a woodland ride, in a damp and drizzly atmosphere, grey, and dull, and dim. I could hear the shooting in the coverts all round me, but no sound of voices, no tramp of feet. Then suddenly the wood on my right hand seemed to open, and I saw a silent procession coming slowly towards me along a leafy glade. Four men carrying another man, prostrate and bleeding, on some kind of litter.

Then that awful dream-feeling of utter helplessness and dumbness, of limbs that seemed like water, and dry lips and throat that tried to shape a cry of terror and could not, came upon me as I had never felt it before. The men came slowly on with their load, the prostrate figure, one arm hanging loose by the side of the litter. I saw it swing as they came along with their burden—hanging from shoulder to wrist with flaccid lifeless hand.

The face was hidden as they came towards me; but I knew whose face it was, the one face upon earth for me. I knew, I knew—and in my great and bitter agony I awoke with a half-strangled cry. I sprang out of bed. There was the dim cold glimmer of day outside, but my watch told me that it was only half-past five—and the brake was not to leave till after six. It was not too late, perhaps. I might stop him yet. I dressed myself with hands that trembled a little, for I was still shaken by the agony of my dream. I would wait for Gilbert at the head of the stairs, waylay him as he was hurrying down to the carriage, and entreat him to forego the day's sport. I should have little difficulty in dissuading him from the journey, I fancied, after what he had said last night. I should seem capricious, perhaps exacting; but what did that matter? I could tell him about my dream afterwards, and he might laugh at me as much as he pleased. I was plaiting up my hair before the looking-glass, in the brightening morning light, when I heard wheels. The brake coming round from the stables perhaps, I thought. No, the sound was of wheels driving away towards the park.

Then in an instant it flashed upon me that my watch might have stopped. It had a knack of stopping occasionally. I rushed to the window, opened it, and leant out to look along the avenue. The brake was disappearing in the distance, with its load of shooters, and I heard the stable clock chime a quarter; the quarter after six, no doubt.

I rang the bell violently, and a housemaid came, scared and wondering at my vehement summons.

"Is the carriage with the gentlemen gone?"

"Yes, ma'am. It started five minutes ago."

"But I didn't hear it drive up to the hall-door?"

"No, ma'am, the gentlemen all got into the carriage in the stable-yard, to save the horses standing at the door in the cold morning, Mr. Strangford said. The guns and things were all put in there."

"Is it past six?" I asked, holding my wretched dumb watch to my ear.

"Yes, ma'am; twenty minutes past."

He was gone—gone beyond my power to recall him. I might have stopped him; might have

watched for him in the corridor, between his room and mine; but that accursed watch had deceived me.

I suppose the housemaid must have thought me mad, for I dashed the poor little Geneva watch down upon the floor, shivering the glass to atoms, and marking the enamelled case with a bruise which it bears to this day; a watch that never went again, and which has lain in the secret drawer of my dressing-case for thirty years—witness of my life's sorrow.

He was gone, and I was powerless to recall him. There was no telegraph in those days. I had no power to intercept him with a message, at this or that point of his journey, imploring him to come back to me. He would have obeyed such a summons gladly, proudly, I knew. Never was lover more devoted. I had but to lift up my finger, and he would come at my beckoning. But there were no means of communication—none—none.

Suddenly an idea flashed across my brain. I thought of a story which my sweetheart and I had read together, within the last few weeks—a novel of rugged power, and an eloquence that

had held us like a spell. I remembered that appealing cry of love which Jane Eyre heard across the bleak Yorkshire hills—blind, broken-hearted Rochester's cry to the woman he adored; and I too called aloud to my lover, called with all the strength of anguish, "Gilbert! Gilbert! come back to me, come back. My beloved, my life, come back to me."

I was standing before the open window, with clasped hands and streaming eyes, gazing through my tears far off to the purple horizon above the leafless elms. I was calling upon him with all the strength of my being, physical and mental, trying to put the concentrated forces of mind and body into that one despairing cry.

There had been much discussion about mesmerism, animal magnetism, and electro-biology of late; and a great deal had been said about Will-power. Surely, if my will could have power and influence over any one, it would be over him: over the man who loved me with all the strength of his brave true heart. But I felt my cry go out into the empty air; felt the futility of that appeal from soul to soul, while

souls were bound and clogged by tabernacles of clay.

I flung myself upon the sofa, buried my face in the cushions, and sobbed in a paroxysm of grief and disappointment. And then the storm of passion gradually died away, and I tried to reason with myself; tried to persuade myself that all this grief of mine was mere childish folly—a dream; only a dream, and I was fretting myself into a fever about it: I, the dreamer, who had seen so many baseless visions, and had never known one to be realized by waking fact. I had not even seen the face of the wounded man, I argued with myself. Even were that ghastly dream-picture to be the foreshadowing of a reality, the victim on the litter might be any other member of the shooting-party. He need not necessarily be Gilbert. And then I told myself, no, the dream-figure was Gilbert's and no other. It had appeared to me—conjured out of emptiness and darkness by the fever of an unresting love. I had no need to see the face. Instinct told me that it was the face of my lover.

So, tempest-tossed by contending emotions, I

wasted an hour pacing up and down the room; trying to finish my toilet, but too agitated to do so; and then at half-past seven o'clock my maid came, and remonstrated with me for having risen so early, and having made such a hopeless confusion of my hair; and took me in hand and dressed me as if I had been a child, and thus made it possible for me to go down to the dining-room, when the bell rang at half-past eight for morning prayers.

His mother was there with her sweet kind smile, and her welcoming look.

Three other ladies of the party were down, and one of them remarked on my wretched appearance.

"You must have had a very bad night, Miss Lester," she said.

"You haven't been fretting about Gilbert's absence, I hope, Bessie," said Mrs. Strangford. "Only one short autumn day and you will have him back again."

"Do you think he really will come back to-night?" I asked, trying not to seem too anxious, lest I should alarm her.

"I do indeed, Bessie. I believe he is foolish

enough for anything where you are concerned."

The servants filed slowly in, and Mrs. Strangford opened the book of family prayer, solemn and somewhat old-fashioned prayers, which carried very little comfort to my mind. I listened for a verse of good augury in the psalm which followed; but all was gloom, a soul snared in the pit, misery, pain, death!

I know not how that dull autumn day dragged itself out to twilight. I know that I counted every stroke of the clock, the hours and the half-hours, with their cathedral-like reverberation in the large lofty hall. There was no visiting among the cottagers, nothing to take me out of myself by making thought impossible. The weather was damp and depressing, just like the atmosphere of my dream, and as Mrs. Strangford had taken cold the day before in a latish drive in an open carriage from the market town, it would have been brutal to ask her to walk or drive about muddy lanes, and go in and out of dripping cottage gardens.

I passed the day, therefore, in hopeless, helpless idleness, wandering aimlessly from room to

room, or standing in one of the deeply recessed drawing-room windows, looking along the avenue; as if there were any hope of any one I cared for appearing there before dark!

Dusk came at last, and I grew a shade more cheerful at the thought that the day was done —the shooting must be all over now. Most of the men would have made up their minds to stay at the Castle, no doubt; but Gilbert would have set his face homewards. I pictured him starting in some light trap, dog-cart, or phaeton, for the long, long, damp and dreary drive; pictured the fast horse, with its hard square trot, forging along the muddy road; the lamps flashing through the darkness, the driver sitting straight and tall, with his face towards home.

I had made, not one, but twenty inquiries about the road and the distance. Was it a good road? Yes, a very good road, level as a billiard table for a great part of the way. And how long would the journey take if he had a good horse?

With a good horse about two hours, Mrs. Strangford told me. She had made the journey very often, and ought to know.

The ladies of the house-party had spent the day cheerfully enough, sitting round one of the capacious fireplaces in the long drawing-room, each absorbed in her particular kind of needle-work, enlivened with a good deal of talk about absent friends and acquaintance—other people's incomes, other people's children. They had taken very little notice of me, seeing my inclination for solitude. I had excused myself from going in to luncheon on the ground of a headache, and Mrs. Strangford had understood my feelings and had let me follow my own bent.

And so in the deepening dusk I found myself alone in the library, a large room at the end of the house, a somewhat gloomy room, but with a solemn air which I loved. It seemed the very home of learning and grave meditation.

I had watched for Gilbert's coming till it was too dark to see anything in the avenue except the dense masses of the leafless elms, and the dull grey of a starless sky. Within there was the glowing light of a large wood fire; but the lamps had not yet been brought in. I had no inclination to read, and, indeed, no power to fix my attention upon a book, however interesting,

so I preferred the fitful light of the fire, and sat half buried in a deep armchair, telling myself that my long day of anxiety was over, and that all would be well.

The dream was only a dream, after all.

I was sitting looking into the fire, with my hands clasped listlessly above my head, when a sudden chillness told me that a door had been opened and that the cold night air was blowing in. I started up and looked round.

Yes, the door had opened and closed again; for he was in the room, my dearest, my life's delight. He was coming slowly towards me through the deep shadows of the long low room. My natural impulse would have been to run to him, to fling my arms round his neck and sob out my delight at his return.

But I was taken too much by surprise, perhaps. My nerves had been overstrung, and for some moments I stood rooted to the ground, my heart beating violently, and that dreary coldness, which I had felt just now, freezing every nerve of motion.

"Oh, Gilbert," I faltered at last, as he came and took up his position in front of the hearth,

and stood there looking down at me with that fond smile I knew so well, "Gilbert, dearest, I have been so miserable all day because of a dreadful dream I had about you last night; but thank God, thank God, you are at home, safe and well! It was like all my other dreams —only idle fear—idle fear for him I love!"

He did not answer, except with that tender smile. He stood looking down at me, with the firelight shining on him one moment, and in the next leaving him in deepest shadow, as the flames rose and fell like a sea of light.

"If there were any truth in that romantic idea about will-power you would have felt the force of my will to-day," I said; "but I suppose that notion is just as foolish as my dream."

"I did feel the power of your will to-day," he said, "and obeyed it. I should not be here else."

It was the first time he had spoken since he came in. He spoke much slower than usual, and his voice had a tone that was strange to me—such a dull, tired voice.

"My dearest!" I exclaimed, "you are dead beat. Let me order you some wine—some tea

—something to restore you after the long drive."

I was rising to go and give the order myself, anxious to bridge the distance between the butler's pantry and the room we were in, and to quicken the dignified movements of the butler; but Gilbert motioned me back to my seat.

"Don't go," he said; "I want you here, dear love!"

"And was it really my summons that hastened your return?" I asked, thrilled at the thought of this mystic link between soul and soul. "But it was early this morning that I called to you—called with all the force of my fear and my love. I was panic-stricken when I found you had gone—the dream seemed like a warning. Did you feel that I wanted you *then?*"

"I felt your influence all the day. On the road, in the early morning, yes; in the spinney, yes."

"And why did not you come sooner?"

"I was not free to come."

He was silent after this. I took his hand,

which hung loose at his side, and lifted it to my lips. It was cold as ice.

"Dear love, you are chilled to the bone. You will be ill if you don't take some means to restore yourself. I must and will get you a hot drink."

"No, no—stay, Bess, stay; I want you here."

There was neither life nor gladness in his voice. I looked at him anxiously, waiting for the flash of the firelight. It flashed and showed me his face, ghastly, greyish white, with darkened lips and glassy eyes.

"My God," I shrieked, "there was truth in my dream after all. You are hurt—seriously hurt!"

I rang the bell violently, and rushed to the door screaming, "Mother, mother!"

It was the name by which I had learnt to call *his* mother. A deadly fear had seized me—fear, of I knew not what. That shrill cry of terror was heard through the house, silent and shut in at this hour. The vehement ringing of the bell alarmed the whole household.

Mrs. Strangford was the first to enter. She came hurrying in, alarmed and bewildered.

"Bessie, Bessie, what is the matter with you?"

"He is ill, he is hurt," I cried; "send for the doctor this instant."

"Who is ill?"

"Gilbert."

I turned and pointed to the hearth where the logs were burning with a brighter, steadier glow than before.

There was no one there—no one. The footman brought in the large shaded reading lamp, and placed it on the table in front of the fireplace by which Gilbert had been standing three minutes before.

"He must have gone out at the other door as you came in," I said. "He came home ten minutes ago. I know there is something wrong. I had a bad dream about him last night, and the dream has come true, in part. He was not killed, as I thought in my dream, but I know he has been hurt. Yes, yes, he has been wounded. See," I cried, showing her my hand in the light of the lamp.

It was the hand that had clasped and fondled his death-cold hand, and it was smeared with

blood. The smears showed faintly, but there could be no doubt as to their existence or their nature.

His mother ran from the room without a word, telling the footman to send off a mounted messenger for the doctor. I followed her to the threshold of her son's room. It was empty. She went along the upstairs corridor calling to him, I with her. We searched for him in every likely and unlikely part of the house, but in vain. No one had seen him come in. The hall-door had been locked at dusk. No servant had heard the opening of any other external door or had heard footsteps in the vestibule or passages.

He had come and gone as the shadows come and go, and the only trace of his presence was the blood-stain upon my hand.

Then I knew that my dream-picture was the picture of that which had been, and that my call had been answered from the land of shadows.

It was after midnight when a carriage drove up to the door, and my mother and I—sitting

silent in the room where I had seen my dear love's white dead face—heard Colonel Walsingham's voice in the hall. He was a very old friend of the family, the eldest member of that merry party which had set out in the chill autumn morning. It was only natural that he should bring the tidings. I had not an instant's doubt as to his errand, and I don't think Mrs. Strangford had either. He came in to us quietly, and our faces told him he had very little to tell us.

"You have heard something," he said, with an amazed look.

"We know," I answered.

And then he told us—a common story—a gun had burst, and the contents were lodged in the true heart of my first and only lover.

My dream was fulfilled to the letter. They had carried him on a litter of beech boughs to the nearest gamekeeper's lodge, and he was lying there to await the home-bringing.

You will not wonder, now you have heard my story, that my hair was grey and my habits of life had grown grave and elderly before I was eight and twenty. But you will wonder, perhaps,

when I tell you that the vision in the wood was my last vivid dream. I have been a light sleeper, and at times a very bad sleeper, for the last thirty years, but the faculty of dreaming for good or for evil went from me for ever after that fatal dream.

THE END.

LONDON: PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
STAMFORD STREET AND CHARING CROSS.